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The Carver's Choice: Tilman Riemenschneider's Monochromatic Altarpiece of the Holy Blood

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Introduction: Riemenschneider—Background and Context

Several years ago I found myself in Rothenburg, Germany at the end of a short trip to Bavaria. My tour guide had mentioned very briefly that there was a wonderful wooden sculpture in the church of St. James that was worth seeing. With this in mind, I approached the church and ascended several steps to the door where I saw a sign for a two euro entrance fee. I immediately turned around and went back to the market square to find other things to do and see that did not cost me my precious euros. That was a horrible mistake. What I missed is arguably one of the most famous altarpieces in all of Germany. Tilman Riemenschneider's *Altarpiece of the Holy Blood* is one of the most important carved wooden altarpieces from the Late Gothic period (Figure 1). Having turned around at the door all those years ago I have now devoted my thesis to this sculptor and his work, especially his altarpiece in Rothenburg. Yes, the one I did not see.

Tilman Riemenschneider (1460 -1531), worked in the Franconian town of Würzburg as a sculptor of altarpieces and other religious works. In the art historical literature, Riemenschneider is most famous as one of the best limewood sculptors in the sixteenth century and the one who intentionally stopped using polychrome and gilding on his sculptures. The limewood *Holy Blood Altarpiece* in St. James Church is one such monochromatic work. The altarpiece has a tinted glaze that unifies the surface of the wood and preserves it with a minimal addition of paint to accentuate the eyes, lips, and facial features of the figures.[1] Certainly, in a period when innumerable polychromed altarpieces were produced, Riemenschneider stands out as one of the few sculptors, often credited as the first, to turn from colorful altarpiece figures to ones in

[1] Riemenschneider's glazed wood is traditionally considered "monochrome," but the art historical literature varies on what is considered monochrome, uncolored wood, or partially polychromed wood. For the purposes of this paper I will be using the term monochrome for any sculpture that is not polychromed; for both glazed sculpture and those without glaze. See Johannes Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture: Meaning, form, conservation* (Los Angeles: Getty Trust Publications, 2015) and Eike Oellermann, "Polychrome Or Not? that is the Question." (*Studies in the History of Art* 65, 2004): 112-123, for the various definitions of monochrome sculpture.

monochrome. The East choir of St. James, however, houses a polychromed and gilded high altar that is characteristic of most Late Gothic altarpieces (Figure 2). Since the two works quite literally face each other on either side of the long nave this creates a strong dichotomy between color and the lack of color. It is in the Rothenburg church of St. James that my initial research questions arose. Colored and not colored, how do these two altarpieces relate within the same space? And how and why was Riemenschneider able to choose not to use color on his altarpiece? And, finally, what is the significance of an artist's use of monochrome in the artistic and historical context of Late Gothic Germany?

Riemenschneider's break with tradition has been explored by many scholars in the hopes of providing possible reasons for his use of monochrome. No examination of his work, however, has explained why such a popular sculptor would choose to forgo polychrome. This paper will not so much examine the origins of monochrome as consider the reasons behind Riemenschneider's decision to carve without painting his works and the context that allowed this. In my study, I argue that while there is no single answer to explain Riemenschneider's choice, the artistic climate at the time allowed him the freedom to make it. In examining the question why Riemenschneider chose monochrome I have found that the current art historical literature tends to discuss his achievement from this one perspective, his innovative use of monochrome. In response, I argue that consideration of Riemenschneider's work as a sculptor should not be limited to just this aspect of his sophisticated sculptural production, but rather it should be treated as one facet of his exploration of a broader artistic language.

The *Holy Blood Altarpiece* exemplifies the way that Riemenschneider's virtuoso carving and his ability to create a complex narrative does not rely on color to enliven the space of the altarpiece or to direct the response of the pious viewer. In chapter one, I explore the dichotomy

set up by the two altarpieces in St. James' church and investigate the characteristics of Riemenschneider's carving that is also evident in other of his works. My examination of the way in which he invested his sculptures with a life-like quality in connection with his use of a monochrome glaze foregrounds his considerations of material, space, and the viewer's response; issues which are more fully considered in chapter five.

In chapter two, I look to Riemenschneider's earliest monochrome altarpiece as a means to understand the stylistic choices that seem so obvious in the *Holy Blood Altarpiece.* Close analysis of this early work draws attention to Riemenschneider's sources which are, in turn, most instructive for understanding his particular sculptural style and typologies, as well as his attitude toward using polychrome. The influence of the engraver Martin Schongauer is especially evident in Riemenschneider's figures. Not only does the sculptor's first monochrome altarpiece show that he looked to the printmaker for subject matter and figural types, but his reworking, sometimes bordering on imitation, demonstrates Riemenschneider's sculptural sophistication in translating such types from the engraved models to carving. Riemenschneider's ability to translate two-dimensional prints into a well-developed sculptural formula is indicative of his sensitivity in translating the lines, textures, and pictorial effects of engraving into wood carving. This in turn helps to explain how he was able to convey such effects in his monochrome carving without relying on the mimetic properties of polychrome.

In chapter three, I look to Riemenschneider's sculptural antecedents in the artistic communities where he may have learned carving. His sculpture, in terms of its plastic form, bears a strong similarity to the work produced in Ulm. This supports the likelihood that Riemenschneider learned wood carving in the workshop of Ulm's most prominent sculptor,

Michel Erhart.[2] Comparison shows Riemenschneider's work to be very like pieces by Erhart and his predecessor in Ulm, Hans Multscher. Riemenschneider's apprenticeship in Ulm would have afforded him an understanding of carving, but also honed his ability to create expressive figures, all while improving upon the conventions of his predecessors. Riemenschneider's work in both stone and wood supports the probability of his training with Erhart in Ulm, since that sculptor worked in both materials.[3] Indeed, Justus Bier suggests that Riemenschneider was first interested in stone carving and then limewood. He argues that Riemenschneider likely traveled to Strasbourg sometime after leaving his clerical studies during his youth, possibly attracted to the city by the famed Nikolaus Gerhaert von Leyden. In this study, though, I look to Ulm first in order to establish Riemenschneider's approach and treatment of limewood, and then to Strasbourg to suggest his ability to execute his typologies and style in various materials whether or not they were colored.

Riemenschneider's work in stone shows the influence of Nikolaus Gerhaert, a Netherlandish sculptor, who only spent several years in Strasbourg. Though, given Gerhaert's short time in the city, Riemenschneider might have worked with one of his successors. In any case he certainly would have known the master's works.[4] Again, it is interesting to see that while Riemenschneider looked to Gerhaert for nuanced techniques of stone carving, he retained his own more restrained intellectual approach which is quite distinct from the other artist's visceral execution of religious imagery. Taking into account the places where Riemenschneider lived and the sculptors with whom he worked helps to establish the artistic climate of the day. Sculpture was a flourishing art in Southern Germany at this time and its strong traditions and recent

[2]Justus Bier, *Tilman Riemenschneider: His Life and Work* (Lexington: The Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1982), 12.
[3] Ibid., 12.
[4] Ibid., 11.

innovations provided rich possibilities. This artistic climate provided the pre-conditions for Riemenschneider to choose between traditional polychrome and the new possibilities presented by monochrome. Given a range of possibilities Riemenschneider employed monochrome to heighten the effect of particular works, but on closer consideration his sculptural language was much more complicated than this one aspect of his work.

Analysis of Riemenschneider's Creglingen Altarpiece in chapter four provides the opportunity to consider Riemenschneider the artist, rather than the 'monochrome sculptor.' Examination of this altarpiece shows the ways in which Riemenschneider's use of monochrome was only one facet of his much broader artistic oeuvre. In this case, monochrome preforms a specific function beyond any sort of aesthetic vision. Southern Germany in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was open to all sorts of new combinations of sculpture and paint, polychrome and monochrome, so there was no one aesthetic formula to which sculptors had to adhere. I argue in this chapter that we credit Riemenschneider with monochrome because of his expertise in using that approach so beautifully to highlight his carving and to construct a legible narrative throughout an entire altarpiece, even one as large as that in Creglingen. Since the Creglingen altarpiece is meant to display a relic, the narrative that Riemenschneider constructs here shows off several facets of his artistic ability. Close analysis of the Creglingen Altarpiece sets up my argument in chapter five where Riemenschneider faces a similar challenge with the *Holy Blood Altarpiece,* but within a more theologically charged circumstance.

In the final chapter I look to the ways in which the various levels of the *Holy Blood Altarpiece* activates the space of St. James, framing the miraculous power of the relic that the altarpiece displays. Inevitably, Riemenschneider's monochrome has been conflated with the idea of a "pre-Reformation sentiment." I argue that Riemenschneider's personal beliefs did not

necessarily inform his creative decisions for this piece, but rather he took into consideration the perspective of sixteenth-century pilgrims and their response to the Holy Blood relic they had often traveled so far to see. Riemenschneider's uncolored wooden sculptures, at Rothenburg and elsewhere, were designed to fulfill a devotional role, but his use of monochrome was only meant to aid that devotion. In this last chapter I return to my initial questions as to why Riemenschneider was able to choose monochrome and what that decision entailed. Riemenschneider's monochromatic *Holy Blood Altarpiece* stands facing a traditional Late Gothic polychromed altarpiece, without color and standing apart (though elevated) it still remains a potent focus within that space. The evident visual power of Riemenschneider's work in this context supports my argument that his choice of monochrome was not simply an aesthetic decision, but rather the mode of execution by which Riemenschneider highlighted the distinctive style and effective narrative of his sculptures for particular ends.

To break away from a narrative that presents Riemenschneider as "*the* monochrome sculptor" I have focused on the visual qualities of his work in order to highlight his mastery beyond the use of monochrome. Focusing on the carving itself not only highlights Riemenschneider's artistic virtuosity, it also reveals something of his ability to elicit a specific viewer response. I have found that looking holistically at Riemenschneider's oeuvre reveals the importance of the practical circumstances within which he had to work. Without doubt the life-like quality of his sculptures leave a deep impression on the viewer; but so does the beauty of his carving. The quality of life and liveliness in Riemenschneider's sculptures have been romanticized to a certain degree in the art historical literature. It is important to recall that Riemenschneider was a master carver, but a very pragmatic one. His economical approach is evident in his creation, early in his career, of a clear set of types that he could draw on to

efficiently complete a variety of works. At the same time, though, he carefully considered all aspects of his sculptures in order to address the particular needs of the commission.

Riemenschneider's choice to use monochrome was a decision that elevated many aspects of his sculptures. The *Holy Blood Altarpiece* is exemplary; Riemenschneider's chose monochrome for this work because the commission was designed to display a very important relic in the West chapel, an extension of St. James that was built specifically for the relic. As the framework for such an important artifact, Riemenschneider created a composition for the altarpiece that directly engages with the viewer and the relic for which it was created. One aspect of the altarpiece that speaks directly to Riemenschneider's approach is the location of the relic in the superstructure, rather than the main corpus. This very tall superstructure allows the relic to be seen from across the entire expanse of the nave; it was visible to the entire congregation from anywhere in the church. Riemenschneider's composition has taken into account the best way to relate to any viewer in the church and to draw them toward the relic.

Late medieval popular piety was dependent on the senses—especially sight— and it was through images that people could best relate to the divine.[5] Riemenschneider engaged the viewer's sense of sight through his use of light, figural gestures and sculptural legibility, as exemplified by *The Holy Blood Altarpiece*. Riemenschneider, here, was carving in a humanistic manner that resulted from and contributed to the personal piety of his time. In this period, as Johannes Taubert points out, "sculpture began to relate more closely to man and his reality, and consequently the figures are characterized by a greater corporeality and sense of reality than their Romanesque forebears."[6] Since Riemenschneider developed very specific typologies, largely

[5]Robert W. Scribner, *Religion and Culture in Germany (1400-1800),* (Boston: Leiden, 2001), 96.
[6] Johannes Taubert. *Polychrome sculpture. Meaning, form, conservation* (Los Angeles: Getty Trust Publications, 2015), 30.

based on popular prints, his figures are imbued with a deep familiarity. They express emotional reactions and convey life even when the material of their making is clearly visible. In this way, Riemenschneider's artistic oeuvre evokes Aby Warburg's concept of the *Pathosformel* or "pathos formula."[7] By developing a clear and explicit artistic style Riemenschneider invested his sculptures with expressions and emotions that resonate with his viewer but which are not overtly visceral. By looking at Riemenschneider holistically it is evident that his sculptural formula, across all mediums and commissions, is able to create a visual reaction in the viewer which utilized monochrome to underscore the profound character of his figures. This powerful formula evokes various human emotions in wood; the monochrome glaze acts to heighten the effect of the thoughtful carving beneath. Riemenschneider's formula not only considers the familiar, in the form of emotional human faces and gestures, but also all elements of each particular commission. Light, viewer interaction, and the desired narrative for each sculptural grouping determines what types Riemenschneider employs to unify his sculptures into a cohesive and sophisticated altarpiece program. Since I turned away from the *Holy Blood Altarpiece* when I first had the chance to see it, I have realized that the physical space and historical context of Riemenschneider's sculpture is integral to understanding his work beyond its beauty in monochrome. If I had entered St. James church I would have appreciated *The Holy Blood Altarpiece*, but perhaps simply as an art object. I might not have understood the choices that Riemenschneider made to active the space and the response of the viewer; including his choice of monochrome in favor of a sculptural expression with many dimensions.

Tilman Riemenschneider's biography provides the background and context for understanding his art. Although Riemenschneider's commissions were mostly for towns

[7] Colleen Becker, "Aby Warburg's *Pathosformel* as Methodological Paradigm," *Journal of Art Historiography* 9, (2013):1. Becker defines *Pathosformel* as an emotionally charged visual trope.

surrounding Würzburg, he was well known beyond Franconia during his lifetime.[8] Justus Bier notes that, "Riemenschneider's influence reached into Swabia and Thuringia, and in isolated cases it penetrated still further, as far as Lübeck and the Moselle valley, Sweden, Switzerland, and the South Tyrol."[9] Archival sources are limited to his life after he became a master in Würzburg, so details about his early years are still largely unknown.[10]

"Riemenschneider" actually means "cutter of the strips of leather" and referred to an artisan before it became a family name.[11] He was born in Heiligenstadt im Eichsfeld, but several years later his family moved to Osterode where his father became master of the mint.[12] The move to Osterode probably had to do with Riemenschneider the elder's inability to pay several debts and it seems that problems continued in Osterode since a curate of Brunswick excommunicated both him and his wife Margaretha.[13] Tilman's future, despite the questionable reputation of his father, was saved by his uncle Nikolaus who was an ecclesiastic and a public official.[14] Nikolaus was a curate for the cathedral in Würzburg and from 1458 until his death in 1478 he was *Fiskal*, or chief fiscal administrator for the bishopric of Würzburg. His connections helped support Tilman's education as a cleric during his adolescent years.[15] A year after his uncle's death Riemenschneider left the church and went on to pursue sculpture.[16] Erfurt is a town where Riemenschneider could have spent several years, specifically in clerical study since it

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[8] Bier, *Tilman Riemenschneider: His Life and Work,* 5. See the Introduction for a complete biography on Riemenschneider. I have condensed his biography to only include the major events, places and occupations that Riemenschneider held to better foreground his work.
[9] Ibid., 6.
[10] Ibid., 8.
[11] Ibid., 15.
[12] Ibid., 8-9.
[13] Ibid., 9.
[14] Ibid., And Hartmut Krohm, "The Sources of Riemenschneider's Art." In *Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Julien Chapuis (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1999.), 66. Riemenschneider's Uncle served under Prince-Bishop Rudolf von Scherenberg (r. the diocese of Würzburg 1466 – 1495).
[15] Bier, *Tilman Riemenschneider: His Life and Work,* 9.
[16] Ibid., 10.

belonged to the diocese of Mainz. Erfurt is also the closest academic center to his birth place Heiligenstadt and Osterode where he moved; it is also the location of the University where Nikolaus Riemenschneider studied.[17] Most importantly, Erfurt had a strong artistic community, particularly in regards to stone carving, so this could have been where Riemenschneider first became interested in sculpture and possibly where he apprenticed with various stone sculptors.[18]

It is not clear just where Riemenschneider received his clerical studies, why he left to pursue sculpture, and where and for whom he apprenticed. Regardless, in December of 1483 Riemenschneider took the journeyman's oath in Würzburg, the same year that his father, Tilman the elder died.[19] In 1485, he became a master and established a sizable workshop. Riemenschneider flourished in Würzburg, in part by means of several advantageous marriages; he was married four times and each marriage brought him sizable property and connections within the city. In the course of his career, he held various political offices. He was elected to the city council in 1504. Subsequent positions included caretaker of municipal buildings, master of fishing waters, hospital administrator, city tax collector, and civilian head of the municipal militia among others. His political career culminated in 1520 when he was elected Burgomaster, or Mayor, of Würzburg.[20]

Towards the end of his life Riemenschneider was confronted with political and religious disturbances including the Reformation and the Peasant's Revolt of 1525. Riemenschneider, as a prominent city official, took an unexpected stance during the Revolt. Würzburg had been ruled by a prince-bishop for centuries, which privileged the clergy. The clergy did not have to pay

[17] Ibid., 10-11.
[18] Ibid., 9.
[19] Charles L. Kuhn, "Riemenschneider in the Harvard Collections," *The Art Bulletin* 56, no. 2 (1974), 244.
[20] Kemperdick, "A Sculptor in Würzburg," 74.

taxes and this lack of a tax base destabilized the socio-economic system.[21] In 1525 the Würzburg prince-bishop, Konrad von Thüngen, wanted to assemble troops from all over the duchy and station them in Würzburg. In response, Riemenschneider aligned himself with the group of peasants and council members who opposed the prince's assumption of power. After the victory of the Princes, Riemenschneider was expelled from the council and was imprisoned on the grounds of starting a false rumor about the resistance. During his imprisonment he was tortured, to what extent is unknown, and was released in August of 1525.[22] After 1525 Riemenschneider did not produce more work, but merely made several repairs to existing altarpieces. He died on July 7, 1531 around age seventy.[23] Two of Riemenschneider's sons became carvers; Jörg in Würzburg and Hans in Nuremberg. Two of his other sons became painters; Bartholomäus, who became a pupil of Dürer, and Tilman, both of them worked in the Tirol region.[24]

The sculptures for which Riemenschneider is best known are significantly less colorful than his political career. Nonetheless, they have achieved considerable fame; it is with his work in monochrome that Riemenschneider is mostly associated with today. All the more reason, then, to note that despite the present day emphasis on his monochrome work, Riemenschneider produced sculptures in both monochrome and polychrome throughout his life. His early career was rooted in the traditions of polychromed altarpieces, which makes his break with tradition all the more telling. Riemenschneider's monochrome was, in fact, a choice. His earliest altarpiece sets up the background for this decision. Moreover, this commission initiated his relation with the city of Rothenburg, ultimately the site of his most famous work.

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[21] Kemperdick, "A Sculptor in Würzburg," 71.
[22] Bier, *Tilman Riemenschneider: His Life and Work,*19.
[23] Ibid., 22.
[24] Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 260.

Riemenschneider's first altarpiece commission came from the Franciscan monastery in Rothenburg ob der Tauber in 1485.[25] This polychromed and gilded *Passion* altarpiece was intended as the high altar retable, today only fragments survive. The *Mourning Women with St John the Evangelist* and *Caiaphas and Soldiers* are two sculptural groups that once were part of the altarpiece's corpus (Figure 3). These two sculptures are considered reliefs since they are not completely carved in the round, but they would have flanked a central crucifix.[26] The altarpiece was painted and gilded by the Franciscan monk Martin Schwarz of Rothenburg (1460 – 1511), who was the guardian of the church from 1485 until 1506 and master of a painter's workshop.[27] It is noteworthy that Riemenschneider, who was a master sculptor by the time he carved this altarpiece, had started his career as a sculptor with a commission in a town where he was not a citizen. It is very possible that Schwarz, the Franciscan painter, was the one who attracted Riemenschneider to Rothenburg in the first place. It was the first of several important commissions in the town; today Riemenschneider's posthumous legacy largely rests on his work in Rothenburg, a fact which ensures the town's importance. Rather than turn away at the door of St. James, as I once did, my study will begin by looking into the church of St. James and analyze the *Holy Blood Altarpiece* in order to examine the remarkable artistry of Tilman Riemenschneider and his choice of monochrome for his sculpture.

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[25] Krohm, "The Sources," 66.
[26] Axel Treptau, "Two Groups from Riemenschneider's Early "Passion" Altarpiece," *Studies in the History of Art* 65 (2004), 149.
[27] Treptau, "Two Groups," 149 and 155 and Michele Marincola, "The Surfaces of Riemenschneider," in *Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Julien Chapuis (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1999), 103.

Chapter I: The Rothenburg Dichotomy

The two altarpieces in the Church of St. James are distanced by a very long nave, but Riemenschneider's *Holy Blood Altarpiece* and Herlin's *Altarpiece of the Twelve Apostles* face one another (Figures 1 and 2). When the Rothenburg municipal council ordered Tilman Riemenschneider's Holy Blood altarpiece for the West choir of the St. James church its High altarpiece was already in place.[28] The two altarpieces have very different functions in addition to the dramatic contrast between their painted and unpainted features. This dramatic juxtaposition provides the perfect opportunity to examine the standards and conventions of altarpiece production that determined color to be integral and the sculptural language Riemenschneider used that allowed for the elimination of color. Riemenschneider's sculptures prove to be facilitators of a narrative that integrated the space and relic for which it was commissioned. Herlins' altar, however, is iconic and only serves as a visual aid for the parishioner's devotion. The role of color in these two altarpieces proves that Riemenschneider's use of monochrome was a deliberate attempt to foreground his altarpiece's narrative and masterful sculptures.

The cabinet maker, Erhart Harschner, first received the commission for *the Holy Blood Altarpiece* in 1499, but Riemenschneider only received a contract for the sculptural figures in 1501.[29] As early as May 1502 the central shrine was assembled, and by 1505 all of the figures had been delivered.[30] Riemenschneider and his workshop produced the Last Supper group in 1502, followed by the two wing reliefs and Annunciation figures, Mary and the Angel Gabriel, in

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[28] Iris Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor and His Workshop* (Königstein im Taunus: Karl Robert Langewiesche Nachfolger Hans Köster, 2004), 73.
[29] Rainer Kahsnitz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006), 222-3. Kashnitz references the preliminary and original contract from April 10, 1501 that states "the images….in the Holy Blood [were] commissioned from master Til." The official contract then states the artist's full name, "Master Till Riemenschneider, sculptor in Würzburg."
[30] Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor,* 73.

1504. In 1505, the Man of sorrows figure for the superstructure was finished.[31] Once completed the altar did not stay in its original location for very long. It remained in the west choir from 1502 to 1575 but in 1575 it was moved to the East choir where it stayed until the 1860s when it was moved to the eastern wall of the southern aisle. Only in 1965, when a church restoration program was initiated, was the altarpiece returned to its original location in the West choir. This conservation work in the 1960s also restored the altarpiece to its original condition, revealing Riemenschneider's glaze and touches of paint on the eyes, lips, nostrils, and eyebrows (Figure 4). The restorers also removed the dark brown glaze from the nineteenth century. Conservators further determined that the original glaze was made of oil, egg whites, traces of ocher, gypsum, white lead, and carbon.[32] Since no dust layer was found beneath the glaze conservators have acknowledged it as original to Riemenschneider's workshop.[33] Because of the slight pooling of the glaze at the junctions of the figures and the cabinetry it suggests that it was applied after the sculptures were installed.[34] Although it is impossible to know Riemenschneider's intentions this original glaze obviously served both practical and aesthetic functions. The glaze unifies the light color of the limewood and any imperfections in the wood grain, and it also creates a lowlight for the sculpted figures by adding a slight tint and a reflective surface.[35] Moreover, this glaze is characteristic of Riemenschneider's work; it was also applied to the Münnerstadt altarpiece and the altarpiece at Dettwang as well as other smaller works from Riemenschneider's workshop.[36]

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[31] Justus Bier, *Tilman Riemenschneider: His Life and Work* (Lexington: The Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1982), 88.
[32] Ibid,.
[33] Johannes Taubert. *Polychrome sculpture. Meaning, form, conservation* (Los Angeles: Getty Trust Publications, 2015), 83.
[34] Michele Marincola, "The Surfaces of Riemenschneider," in *Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Julien Chapuis (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1999), 103.
[35] Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture,* 83. Taubert argues that Riemenschneider's glaze has the same effect as varnished paintings.
[36] Ibid., 84. The conservation efforts of Eike Oellermann will also be discussed in Chapter two on the Münnerstadt Altarpiece.

Besides its liturgical function, Riemenschneider's *Altarpiece of the Holy Blood* is a reliquary. Since the thirteenth century Rothenburg has prized three drops of blood that appeared during a celebration of Mass. Riemenschneider's altarpiece holds a gilded cross containing this sacramental relic in the superstructure above the main corpus (Figure 5).[37] Since the drops of blood were not considered transubstantiated wine, but rather wine that became blood, Rothenburg's miraculous relic prompted pilgrimages, indulgences, and healings; the town prospered from this relic and Riemenschneider's altarpiece facilitated its fame. Doubtless his splendid framing of the relic also heightened its impact and directed the viewer's response.[38]

The first impressions of a sixteenth-century pilgrim would surely have been of the altarpiece's size. It is a gigantic construction. The height from the altar table to the top of the superstructure measures 9.70 meters and its width, with both wings open is 4.17 meters.[39] In height the figures in the main corpus measure between 1.30 and 1.34 meters.[40] This corpus, the focal point of the altarpiece, depicts The Last Supper (Figure 6). This is the first known use of the Last Supper in a central altarpiece shrine and even within the Last Supper scene Riemenschneider has diverged from traditional depictions.[41] Rather than have Christ at the center of the scene, he is off to the left side and Judas occupies the center; Christ is set apart, however, by his large head that lies above all of the other disciples. The twelve disciples are grouped together in an uneven fashion. On the right there are a group of five disciples and on the left seven figures. All of the figures are sculpted with thick curly hair and large, almond shaped eyes. The cheek bones cast shadows on their faces and some look intently at others or into the distance

[37] Joseph Koerner, "The Reformation of the Image", (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008) 345.
[38] Ibid,.
[39] Kahsnitz, *Carved Splendor,* 228.
[40] Ibid,.
[41] Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 74.

while others express communication through their various hand gestures. What is poignant about all of the figures in this scene is how clearly the gestures are communicated without the use of paint. Veins, facial lines, and musculature are all accentuated. The painted eyes allow the viewer to determine each figure's gaze and expression. Moreover, Riemenschneider has rendered the figures with enough detail to convey each disciple's age, emotion, and countenance without weighing the figures down with drapery or iconography. They are able to freely move despite the constraints of the main corpus; the clothing is clearly articulated with many fine details, but it does not conceal the figure or the viewer's understanding of the scene. Rather, it clings to the body and at the same time fills in spatial voids.

Judas, standing in the center, commands the corpus scene. Christ gazes at Judas with one hand holding up a piece of bread and the other rests on Saint John who has buried himself in Christ's lap (Figure 7). Five other disciples, who flank Christ, contemplate the scene before them. Judas is turned away from the viewer; he seems to speak to Christ as he clutches the bag of silver in one hand and grasps his cloak in the other. Christ presents Judas with a 'false communion,' by which he uses the bread to reveal that Judas will betray him.[42] Judas acts as the intercessor between the monstrance that would have been placed on the altar table below and the relic and the risen Christ above the corpus.[43] This composition is less about Judas's betrayal and more about a path to redemption. Christ identifies the sinner Judas, but the altarpiece also offers a narrative of salvation. A beardless disciple to the left of Judas points down to the altar table, reminding the pilgrim of Christ's body, while the relic reinforces the redemptive power of his blood (Figure 8). The pilgrim would have entered the chapel from the north, viewing first the

[42] Ibid,.
[43] Ibid, 76.

back of Judas, identifying with him, but also facing Christ. From there, the pilgrim could look up and see the relic between themselves and the risen Christ.[44]

The altar's liturgical function is complicated by Riemenschneider's arrangement of the narrative, but at the same time his use of different materials enhances the effectiveness of the scene. Beyond his expert carving in limewood, Riemenschneider used light to heighten the narrative of the main corpus. The lancet windows in the back of the corpus repeat the windows of the West choir which allows ample light to illuminate the figures (Figure 9). This play of light focuses on Judas. The morning sunlight illuminates the front row of figures, except Judas, while the back row remains in shadow. The afternoon light then brings the back row into light. As the sun moves south Judas is illuminated as the solitary center of the event.[45] The spotlight effect on the figure of Judas engages the viewer in a unique way. Baxandall argues that Riemenschneider's manipulation of light is as much a medium as the limewood itself. Riemenschneider's glaze also creates an artistic affect among the narrative. Johannes Taubert states, "the light does not bounce directly off a matte surface of untreated wood but is refracted by the pigmented glaze…this reinforces the impression of the floating immateriality that is so characteristic of Riemenschneider's art."[46]

The wings of the *Holy Blood Altarpiece* are as important as the corpus in their narrative function; they, too are a testament to Riemenschneider's sculptural genius (Figure 10). The wings create a "before and after" for the central scene of the Last Supper with the Entry into Jerusalem on the left and the Agony in the Garden on the right.[47] Both reliefs have the same

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[44] Ibid,. 79.
[45] Michael Baxandall, "The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 189 and Julien Chapuis, "Recognizing Riemenschneider ," in *Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Julien Chapuis, (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1999), 32.
[46] Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture*, 84.
[47] Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 74.

qualities as the figures in the round. The *Entry into Jerusalem* depicts Christ riding into the city gates with throngs of people in front of and behind him. Several of the disciples behind Christ are identifiable since they are identical to figures in the main corpus. Moreover, Riemenschneider has rendered the same typologies and drapery techniques that are seen in the figures in the round. The *Agony in the Garden* depicts multiple figures confined behind a gate, which heightens the urgency of the crowds seeking Christ. The rest of the composition, however, is tiered to allow Christ sufficient room as he kneels in prayer, while the three disciples sleep in the foreground. Christ's stance forms a triangle which draws attention to his face, with his wide eyes looking upward in concern. The remaining sculptural elements also support the narrative of the corpus.[48] Mary and the Angel Gabriel, sculpted in the round, flank the relic in the superstructure. Together with the Man of Sorrows in the superstructure the *Holy Blood Altarpiece* represents the story of Christ's life and sufferings (Figure 11).[49] While Riemenschneider's monochromatic altarpiece relies heavily on narrative and expression, the high altar of the church in the East choir presents a different approach.

The colorful main altarpiece of St. Jakobskirche provides a startling contrast to Riemenschneider's monochromatic work. It is a retable painted by Friedrich Herlin of Nördlingen (b. 1430 d. ca. 1500) and signed and dated 1466. The altarpiece is often called the *Altarpiece of the Twelve Apostles* since it depicts the twelve apostles in its predella (Figure 2). The sculptor of the St. Jacob's High Altar figures is unknown, but the cabinet maker has been identified as Hans Waidenlich and, as noted, the painting is the work of Friedrich Herlin. [50]

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[48] Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors*, 262. Note the two small figures, one above each wing depict Zechariah above the right wing and St. Thomas Aquinas above the left.
[49] Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 74.
[50] Kashnitz, *Carved Splendor*, 59. And Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture,* 180.

Although no documents or contracts survive that pertain to its commission, the altarpiece was commissioned by the city of Rothenburg, quite likely to replace an earlier one.[51]

St. James had been Rothenburg's only parish church since the thirteenth century. Since its creation the church was a part of by the Dettwang parish; in 1258 it was incorporated into the Teutonic order by the Würzburg bishop. Initially the building and funds were shared between the city and the Teutonic order but in 1398 the city won full control. Rothenburg adopted Protestantism around 1545 and as a result the Herlin altarpiece was kept closed. The scenes on the outside of the wings were painted over by Martin Greulich in 1582, the new work depicted Christological scenes rather than the martyrdom of Saint James, only the view of the Rothenburg market and view of a Spanish city were spared.[52] The overpainting on the outer wings was eventually removed by Professor R. Lischka of the Bavarian State Conservation Office in 1922.[53] Because the altarpiece was not reopened until the beginning of the nineteenth century the sculptures and paintings inside the corpus are unusually well preserved; the Herlin altar is one of only a few Gothic altarpieces that remains intact and an excellent example of the fifteenth-century tradition.[54] Nonetheless the conservation treatment removed a buildup of centuries of mop oil, petroleum, and other cleaning agents that had created a dark layer covering the polychrome.[55]

The *Altarpiece of the Twelve Apostles* closely rivals Riemenschneider's *Holy Blood Altarpiece* in size, measuring 8.54 meters high from the altar table to the tip of the baldachin and the shrine measures 3.67 meters high. The height of shrine figures measures 1.27 meters and the

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[51] Kashnitz, *Carved Splendor*, 58.
[52] Ibid, and Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture,* 183.
[53] Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture,* 157 and 183.
[54] Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture,* 183.
[55] Ibid,.

crucified Christ measures 1.34 meters with an arm span of 1.46 meters.[56] The rich colors and the very finite architectural elements of this altarpiece allow the work to directly engage with the stained glass windows behind it. As if an extension of the space, the Herlin altarpiece boldly defines the main altar space and the attention of parishioners. Its gilt encasement frames the depictions of Christ and various saints who are draped in gold and accentuated by rich hues of red, blue, green and white. The main corpus features a standard altarpiece composition of the crucified Christ above the Virgin Mary, St. John and several other saints (Figure 12).[57] Christ and the six saints are sculpted in the round; the figure of Christ is accompanied by four angels. Each altar wing depicts four painted scenes from the life of Mary and of Christ. The predella also shows painted figures on either side of Christ. Intricate gilded tracery throughout leads to the superstructure and features Christ as Man of Sorrows.

All of the sculptures of the Herlin altarpiece are carved from a single piece of limewood and are hollowed out in the back.[58] A crucifixion dominates the center of the corpus; the Virgin Mary looks up at the cross while four angels surround the upper section, all express grief and prayer. The emaciated figure of Christ is stretched on a simple cross; his hands are hidden by tracery, but his arms feature streams of blood trickling from the nails in his palms and a light charcoal color articulates his veins (Figure 13). While the veins are not necessarily anatomically correct they convey Christ's suffering of Christ and emphasize the carnality of his crucifixion. Likewise, the downward tilt of his head communicates the weight of the crown of thorns which is thick with multiple layers of branches. The sculptor has artfully rendered Christ's wavy hair hovering off of his head and down his right side. The streaks of blood continue down the neck

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[56] Kashnitz, *Carved Splendor*, 64. Measurements from K.W. Bachmann and Eike Oellermann.
[57] Ibid., 59. Kahsnitz notes that, "Christ's crucifixion with Mary and John flanked by standing saints…had been a traditional subject for carved and painted retables since the fourteenth century."
[58] Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture,* 189.

and to the chest along the length of the sternum. Christ's chest is unique because the musculature over the ribs is articulated sculpturally as a result of the paint accentuating the shadows of the rib cage. The drapery of the loin cloth here is perhaps the best testament to this sculptor's skill as a carver. It hugs Christ's body so that his figure is articulated, but the folds clearly show how it has been twisted and bunched up even as it flutters off the body. The legs of Christ, like the arms, show his veins; the pierced feet join in a boxy rectangular shape. Color, with the Christ on the cross, effectively acts to invest the figure with visible suffering and pain.

Other than the figure of Christ, the rest of the altarpiece sculptures exemplify the late Gothic configuration of iconic religious figures. The six figures below Christ do not engage with one another, although the Virgin Mary and St. John both look up at Christ which connects the three figures as the center of the corpus (Figure 12). Each figure has attributes, specific gestures and motifs that identify the saint. Saint James is identified by the shell motifs and Saint Elizabeth of Hungary holds a loaf of bread and a pitcher symbolizing her generosity to the poor. Saints Leonard and Anthony who is identified by his bell stands next to Saint John.[59] Overall, the figures are weighted down by gold drapery and detailed undergarments that evoke a "blockiness" rather than a human figure. Only their heads and hands, though enveloped in drapery, communicate movement. Whereas Christ hovers above them, stretched and weightless, the six figures below suggest weight and permanence. Even the pedestals that support each figure are monumental. Very little drapery hangs over the pedestal which supports the figures traditional, Gothic monument-like stature.

The Herlin altarpiece is a rarity; one of a very few complete late gothic altarpieces, all the more exceptional in that it is in its original location. The sculptures are traditional in many ways.

[59] Kahsnitz, *Carved Splendor,* 59.

First, though the figures suggest volume they are limited in their expression of movement, which is described by Rainer Kahsnitz as an "imaginary rectangle enclosing the figure's outline and defining it." Saint John and Mary have slightly more dimension and movement since they lean backwards to look up to create a subtle curve in the center of the corpus. The saints who accompany Mary and John in the corpus express a sense of great weight and immobility that contrasts with Christ's gaunt body.[60] This High Altar calls upon its congregation to contemplate a Crucifixion scene that has become emotionally charged through the use of rich colors and gilding. Johannes Taubert, points out, though, that the Herlin altarpiece is not so traditional and he argues that it displays a level of innovation and individuality especially in the way it draws upon the Netherlandish sources, the paintings of Rogier van der Weyden's *Saint Columba Altarpiece* and the sculpture of Nicolaus Gerhaert von Leiden.[61] Both of whom he credits with influencing Riemenschneider's sculptural style. Therefore, the altarpieces of Rothenburg's St. James church set up many questions regarding the use of polychrome and monochrome since they were created only several decades apart.

The two great altarpieces within Saint James's Church—the High altar and Riemenschneider's pilgrimage reliquary of the *Holy Blood*—are unique in many ways, but even more so in the way that they face each other in the church (Figure 14). St. James is unusual in its double-apse design. The church, though unified in length and design, was built in three sections.[62] The East choir was built from 1304-50 and the Nave in 1373-1400. The West chapel (1453-71), where the Riemenschneider altarpiece is located, is elevated and crosses over the

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[60] Ibid., 61.
[61] Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture,* 182. And Hartmut Krohm, "The Sources of Riemenschneider's Art." In *Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Julien Chapuis (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1999.), 51. Krohm argues that the crucifix and angels in particular are indicative of a follower of Gerhaert.
[62] Katherine Boivin, "Holy Blood, Holy Cross: Dynamic Interactions in the Parochial Complex of Rothenburg," *Art Bulletin* 99, no. 2 (June 2017): 50. Boivin specifically points out the uniformity of the roofline

major thoroughfare of Klingengasse (Figure 15).[63] Within this incredibly long nave the two altarpieces face each other from their respective positions. Sixteenth-century viewers and pilgrims accessed the *Holy Blood Altarpiece* from within the nave using either of the two staircases that now flank an organ that was installed in the 1960s.[64] Despite the twentieth-century organ that disrupts the continuity of the St. James nave, the altarpieces still have a unique relationship that presents several questions.[65] Central, for my study, is trying to determine why Riemenschneider chose not to polychrome this work which he knew would stand in such marked contrast to the elaborately polychromed main altarpiece. Moreover, how does Riemenschneider's choice relate to the role of color in his work more generally and were his choices—now seen as a watershed for the later development of monochrome sculpture—so singular in his own time.

[63] Ibid., 42.
[64] Ibid., 50.
[65] "St. James in Rothenburg - Pilgrim's Church and Home of Riemenschneider," Rothenburg Tourism Service. https://www.rothenburg-tourismus.de/en/discover/the-highlights-of-rothenburg-ob-der-tauber-top10-sights/st-james-church/

Chapter II: Riemenschneider's Origins and Typology

The Münnerstadt altarpiece is one of Tilman Riemenschneider's earliest altarpiece commissions (Figure 16). In 1490 he was asked to create this altarpiece for the parish church of Mary Magdalene in Münnerstadt, a town north of Würzburg.[66] It was completed by September 30, 1492, when he was about thirty years old.[67] This work marks the beginning of his use of monochrome. Moreover, as such an early work it reveals the possible influences that shaped his style. Understanding theses sources clarifies Riemenschneider's very characteristic typologies and sculptural approach. His sculptural "formula" is consistent throughout his career and is not limited to materials or color. Rather, his sculptures are memorable and effective regardless of whether or not he used monochrome.

In the fifteenth century the city of Münnerstadt had a population between 2,000 and 2,500; the economy was largely based on craft trades, particularly textiles. A branch of the Teutonic Knights was present in the city since 1220, but in 1335 Münnerstadt regained control over its administration and justice.[68] The knights wielded significant power over the Church of Mary Magdalene before this shift in power. It was the municipal council, in charge by the fifteenth century, who ordered the altarpiece from Riemenschneider, but it is likely that the Teutonic Knights still had some say in the matter. On June 26, 1490 Riemenschneider signed a contract with, "the burgomaster of Münnerstadt, members of the municipal council, and the master builder of the church."[69] In 1833 a chest found in the parish church contained documentary information on the altarpiece and the contract (Figure 17). This important find

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[66] "Catalogue of the Exhibition," in *Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Julien Chapuis, (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1999), 212.
[67] Justus Bier, *Tilman Riemenschneider: His Life and Work* (Lexington: The Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1982), 82-3.
[68] "Catalogue," ed. Julien Chapuis, 212.
[69] Ibid., 212

established that the Mary Magdalene altarpiece is Riemenschneider's earliest known monochrome commission.[70]

The contract clearly sets out instructions for which figures were to be included in the altarpiece, though Riemenschneider was responsible for their arrangement and design. The wings of the altarpiece would have been shut on weekdays and Sundays throughout Lent and Advent. The only figures visible at such times when the wings are shut are Christ's dead body, held by God, and flanked by Mary and St John the evangelist, and Saint John the Baptist above, pointing to the lamb of God. Julien Chapuis suggests that the theme of the altarpiece was intended to be the redemption of humankind through Christ's death.[71] If so, then when the wings are open the altarpiece would evoke the "concept of forgiveness" a theme which would be magnified by the surrounding scenes from the life of Mary Magdalene. Despite being Riemenschneider's earliest monochrome altarpiece commission, the Magdalene altar is one of his largest, and in many ways a testament to his ambition. Notably, too, the altarpiece has a monochrome glaze. Moreover, there is no mention of polychrome in the original contract, which suggests that the church officials fully expected Riemenschneider to deliver an unpolychromed, or monochromatic, work.[72] For quite some time it has been assumed that Riemenschneider's Münnerstadt altarpiece was the first monochrome altarpiece. That seems not to be the case. In 1992 conservator Eike Oellermann published new findings on an earlier altarpiece that was monochrome.[73] The high altar of Sankt Martin in Lorch am Rhein dates to 1483 and has a similar monochrome glaze as that used by Riemenschneider (Figure 18).[74]

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[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid., 217
[72] Ibid., 213.
[73] Krohm, "The Sources," 63.
[74] Ibid. Also Michele Marincola, "The Surfaces of Riemenschneider," in *Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Julien Chapuis (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1999), 111-112. The coating,

Despite evidence that the Magdalene Altarpiece was intended to be monochrome it was subsequently painted. For reasons still unknown, a report from Hassfurt dated October 7, 1497, only seven years after the original commission, outlines plans to paint the altarpiece.[75] Ultimately, Veit Stoss, a sculptor from Nuremburg, was commissioned to paint the Münnerstadt altarpiece and he did so between February 1504 and June 1505. He also added four painted scenes depicting the legend of Saint Kilian to the back of the altar wings.[76] Despite the strict gild regulations that were usual in German cities at the time, Stoss was both a sculptor and a painter. This exception may be because Nuremburg—where Stoss had practiced—was a self-governed city that allowed artists more fluidity among various practices.[77] Stoss was in Münnerstadt at the time because he was fleeing a pending lawsuit against him in Nuremburg. Notably, he was paid 220 guilders for the painting whereas Riemenschneider was only paid 145 guiders which would have also been used to pay the joiner who built the encasement for the figures.[78] Although there is no clear answer as to why Stoss was paid more for painting, even more mystery surrounds why the church officials of Münnerstadt decided to have the altarpiece painted only five years after Riemenschneider completed the work. It took Stoss much longer to receive the painting commission, about twelve years after the altarpiece was complete, but someone must have found Riemenschneider's monochromatic work to be incomplete or displeasing. It has even been suggested that the monochrome glaze was intended to serve as a temporary finish.[79] This

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as Marincola states is a, "material similar to a penetrating stain (perhaps based on plant extracts) used to tint the surface of the wood, followed by a sealing layer of oil and protein."

[75] "Catalogue," ed. Julien Chapuis, 213.

[76] Ibid., 216.

[77] Marincola, "The Surfaces," 102.

[78] "Catalogue," ed. Julien Chapuis, 212 and 216.

[79] Michele Marincola and Jack Soultanian, "Monochromy, Polychromy, and Authenticity: The Cloisters' *Standing Bishop* Attributed to Tilman Riemenschneider," Getty Conservation Institute, (November 11-14, 1994). See for more on the conservation of monochrome sculptures and the possible complications of sculptures painted that were originally monochrome.

economical argument suggests that the Münnerstadt church had the altarpiece painted afterwards when they had the funds to do so. However, this theory has been disputed by a recent study on the surface treatment of the Münnerstadt altarpiece. Conservation efforts in 2004 shed light on Riemenschneider's monochromatic glaze. According to the evidence gathered by the Hahn-Meitner-Institut in Berlin the dye used to give the glaze its uniform coloration of brown and yellow is most likely from *morin*, but could also be from *fisetin*.[80] Both *morin* and *fisetin* are obtained from yellow woods which means that they would have been imported. This contradicts the economic argument, because importing materials to create Riemenschneider's glaze would have been expensive. From these recent conservation reports it is clear that Riemenschneider's Mary Magdalene altarpiece was never considered unfinished. The question remains as to who made the decision to paint the altarpiece. This altarpiece's unique history is indicative of the need to consider the socio-historical setting of Riemenschneider's work to understand the role of monochrome in his sculptures. Still, with the Magdalene altarpiece Riemenschneider at least given the option to make a monochromatic work.

Since Riemenschneider's altarpiece in Münnerstadt was one of his first altarpiece commissions and an early example of a monochrome altarpiece, it is significant that he was able to use this technique even if the glazed limewood finish was only retained for a few years. In any case, his work in Münnerstadt gives a preview of what was to become the characteristic Riemenschneider altarpiece and establishes the young artist within the traditions of late gothic sculpture. His mastery of the limewood in this altarpiece, in addition to its intended monochrome finish, gives considerable weight to viewing the young Riemenschneider as a sculptor with a

[80] Rudolf Göbel and Christian-Herbert Fischer, "New Findings on the Original Surface Treatment of the Münnerstadt Altarpiece," *Studies in the History of Art* 65, (2004):127.

distinctive technique and nuanced style. Moreover, the Magdalene altar marks the beginning of Riemenschneider's artistic career not only because it was monochromatic but also because it demonstrates the talented young sculptor's ability to choose between color and its absence.

Aside from being painted by Veit Stoss, the Münnerstadt Altarpiece has suffered other changes. During the Peasant's War in 1525 the altarpiece received an unknown amount of damage.[81] The next several decades were marked by shifts in power between Lutherans and Catholics in Münnerstadt, so the church and its altarpiece were not given much attention.[82] Even worse was the Baroque remodeling of the church in the seventeenth century, a renovation which involved dismantling the altarpiece and replacing it with a "classicizing framework" that incorporated only some of Riemenschneider's sculpted figures. During this same period a painter was commissioned to clean the paint from the altarpiece, which likely meant the removal of Stoss's polychromy. Finally, in 1756 authorities ordered the removal of the Assumption group, probably because the nudity of the Magdalene was found offensive.[83] In short, despite retaining most of its carving the Münnerstadt Altarpiece we see today only provides an impression of the altarpiece Riemenschneider first envisioned. Nonetheless, close examination of Riemenschneider's first monochrome altarpiece helps to inform our understanding of the origins of his innovative artistic career.

The central corpus of the monochromatic Mary Magdalene altarpiece, formerly in Münnerstadt but now at the Bayerisches National Museum, depicts Mary Magdalene accompanied by six angels (Figure 19). The Magdalene is in a contrapposto pose with her hands

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[81] Hartmut Krohm and Eike Oellermann, "Der ehemalige Münnerstädter Magdalenenaltar von Tilman Riemenschneider und Geschichte - Forschungsergebnisse zur monochromen Oberflächengestalt," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Vereins für Kunstwissenschaft,* (1980): 58.
[82] Ibid.
[83] "Catalogue," ed. Julien Chapuis, 216.

joined in an expression of prayer or devotion. She levitates among six angels who reach out towards her. Together the figures are arranged in an oval shaped composition. The Magdalene figure is in fine condition, despite several areas of cracking and worm holes which are typical of wooden sculptures from this period. The angels are in similarly good shape, though some are missing hands and forearms. The Magdalene figure exemplifies the ideal female form of Riemenschneider's time. She has shifted her weight to her right side, with the right foot forward and a slight bend in the knee. The pose here gives the figure a natural lifelike appearance. The saint's torso is elegantly formed with wide hips and a small waist just barely concealed by her delicate hands. Her fingers do not quite make contact, which conjures a sense of movement, as if the viewer has interrupted her prayers. Her body is covered in wavy locks of hair with the exception of her neck, face, breasts, hands, knees, and feet. Riemenschneider has expertly rendered a full body covered in hair, but her feminine features and shape are still visible; indeed, the Magdalene's long flowing locks of hair cascade down her body in a way that outlines and accentuates her womanly figure. Her head is shifted towards the left as she gazes into the distance. This lack of direct eye contact with the viewer further enhances this moment of ascension and prayer. The modeling of her face features an exaggerated brow bone and nose that cast shadows across the face which invests the limewood with a sense of life. Her small closed lips heighten this moment of silent communication. Despite the Magdalene's hirsute body, Riemenschneider has successfully carved an ideal female, marked by particular characteristics that he employs consistently for other female figures in his later works. The Virgin Mary in the predella of the Creglingen altarpiece, for example, is remarkably similar to Mary Magdalene. Both convey a sense of softness in their pose and expression (Figure 20).

Riemenschneider, very early on in his career, created a female form characterized by long curly hair, a subdued countenance, and petite facial features. His female figures are notably similar to Martin Schongauer's engravings, which would have been circulating throughout Germany during Riemenschneider's lifetime. Since it is very possible that Riemenschneider apprenticed in Strasbourg, not far from Colmar, where Schongauer spent most of his life, he would surely have come in contact with these engravings. Schongauer's engraving *The Madonna and Child with the Apple,* for instance, is very similar to Riemenschneider's Mary (Figure 21).[84] Given this distinct similarity it seems likely that Schongauer's engravings were the inspiration for Riemenschneider's sculptures. In this case, Riemenschneider has shown great artistry and practicality by adopting a type that can be replicated by workshop apprentices and also a type that would have been familiar to the general public since Schongauer's engravings were so popular. Riemenschneider also demonstrates his unique ability to take a black and white, two-dimensional work on paper and translate it into a three-dimensional wood sculpture in the round or in relief and with textures that evoke the engravers marks and modeling. This typology is evident already in the Münnerstadt altarpiece, it includes, but is not limited to, Riemenschneider's female figures.

Riemenschneider repeats his female type quite often. One example, the face of *Eve* flanking the portal of the Chapel of Our Lady in Würzburg is very similar to the Madonna in the superstructure of the *Holy Blood Altarpiece* in addition to the Mary figures mentioned above.[85] Riemenschneider's female figures are most clearly drawn from Schongauer's engravings, but he

[84] Max Lehrs, *Martin Schongauer: The Complete Engravings: A Catalogue Raisonné* (San Francisco: Alan Wofsy Fine Arts, 2005): 172.
[85] Charles L. Kuhn, "Riemenschneider in the Harvard Collections," *The Art Bulletin* 56, no. 2 (1974), 244.

established a particular female typology, this is also true of his male figures. Since there are significantly more male figures that Riemenschneider portrayed there are more characteristics that distinguished them from one another, but his ability to establish a formula coincides with the size of his workshop. Riemenschneider's types were easily replicated by assistants and were expressed well in various materials, such as limewood and stone, both in monochrome as well as color.

The Münnerstadt altarpiece's predella is exemplary of Riemenschneider's male typology since it provides four figures, the four Evangelists, who represent types that are repeated throughout Riemenschneider's oeuvre (Figure 22). The commission for the Münnerstadt altarpiece specified that the predella would have busts of the Evangelists with a bookstand and their specific attributes.[86] The Evangelists are arranged in order of the Gospels, and instead of following the contract, Riemenschneider depicted each evangelist seated with only John to the far right with a bookstand. Each figure interacts within the space in a unique way. Their eyes gaze in various directions while clutching scrolls, codices, and drapery. Matthew and John are cloaked in drapery whereas Mark and Luke have caps and humanist garb. This distinction follows the tradition of Matthew and John as eyewitnesses of Christ versus Mark and Luke, the supposed followers of Peter and Paul. Therefore Matthew and John evoke a classical demeanor while Mark and Luke are "examples of pious learning."[87]

Luke is the only figure who faces the viewer. He caresses his symbol, an ox that kneels beside him, and delicately rests his right hand on a codex covered by his cloak. The Luke figure is one that is well defined in this early altarpiece and his features are repeated several times

[86] "Catalogue," ed. Julien Chapuis, 217.
[87] Ibid., 218.

throughout Riemenschneider's career.[88] John is consistently represented as a beardless adolescent with long curly hair.[89] The same figure of John can be identified in the *Holy Blood Altarpiece* corpus where John lays his head on Christ's lap, and in the Creglingen Altarpiece corpus where he looks up to the Virgin. The facial features of all the evangelists are replicated throughout Riemenschneider's limewood works, and by the time of the *Holy Blood Altarpiece* Riemenschneider had a variety of fully developed types.[90]

Beyond specific figures, Riemenschneider was able to successfully develop features that were utilized throughout his career.[91] Baxandall describes the "Riemenschneider eye" as large, down-turned, asymmetrical with six or seven S-shaped grooves according to age (Figure 4). While the "Riemenschneider hair" constitutes about six carving styles and techniques and the same applies to faces that also belong to a limited stock.[92] Notably, too, Riemenschneider was able to uniformly carve these characteristics in various materials including limestone, alabaster, and marble. All of these physiognomies were developed by Riemenschneider, but expertly delegated to his many assistants.[93] The replication of features and employment of numerous assistants could seem unoriginal, however, the ability to delegate his artistic production to others is characteristic of important artists of the period and underscores his treatment and

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[88] Ibid., "Luke is the first of one of Riemenschneider's most ubiquitous types: the middle-aged man, with a strong narrow nose, half shut eyes set at an angle, thin narrow mouth, square jaws, and prominent cheekbones, conveying an expression both of melancholy and interiority."
[89] Ibid, and Kuhn, "Riemenschneider in the Harvard Collections," 244.
[90] Kuhn, "Riemenschneider in the Harvard Collections", 244. Kuhn states, "characteristic facial types appeared early in his art and became almost a stereotyped cast of characters…by about 1504, in the *Altarpiece of the Holy Blood* in Rothenburg, the entire repertory of physiognomy has developed."
[91] For further comparison of Riemenschneider's repetitive figures see Justus Bier, "St. Andrew in the Work of Tilman Riemenschneider." *The Art Bulletin* 38, no. 4 (1956).Bier analyzes the *St. Andrew* figure from the Altarpiece of the Twelve Apostles, St. Kilian, Windseim (Heidelberg, Kurpfälzisches Museum). This sculpture exemplifies many of the characteristics found in the predella evangelists and Bier compares it to the corpus figures of the Creglingen altarpiece.
[92] Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 180.
[93] Kuhn, "Riemenschneider in the Harvard Collections", 244.

understanding of materials. Baxandall argues that this treatment exalts the sculptural process, especially within the guild society that Riemenschneider had to negotiate. The replication of types is what allows the viewer to *recognize* Riemenschneider, "if component features such as eyes and hair are repetitious, as they certainly are, at least they reveal an acquired assurance about just how they work and how they can be delicately applied." [94]

Riemenschneider's workshop would have consisted of *Knaben* (apprentices) and *Gesellen* (journeymen).[95] Apprenticeships usually lasted four years and when completed the young men could travel the region as journeymen.[96] Riemenschneider had a very successful workshop and historical documents record twelve names of apprentices over the forty years that Riemenschneider was active in Würzburg in addition to the twenty-six journeymen that scholars suggest he had (Figure 23).[97] From existing records Riemenschneider had four journeymen between 1490 and 1499, around fourteen between 1500 and 1510 and another eight or nine from 1511 to 1524.[98] Riemenschneider, in the late gothic period, was working within the confines of the guild system or at least a structured craft organization that was regulated to a certain extent.[99] The guild system was meant to equalize opportunity and prevent competition all while maintaining a high standard of production. In Würzburg and other surrounding cities, the sculptor's guild occupied the smallest group; from 1470 to 1522 only eight sculptors are

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[94] Michael Baxandall. "The Perception of Riemenschneider," in *Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages,* ed. Julien Chapuis. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999), 85.
[95] Iris Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor and His Workshop* (Königstein im Taunus: Karl Robert Langewiesche Nachfolger Hans Köster, 2004), 19.
[96] Ibid., 21.
[97] Kemperdick, "A Sculptor in Würzburg," 77.
[98] Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 21 and Kuhn, "Riemenschneider in the Harvard Collections," 244. It worth noting that Riemenschneider held various positions in the municipality of Würzburg and presumably this would have kept him very busy, so his workshop would have had to have been incredibly organized and very large to accommodate his societal obligations and the scale of his commissions.
[99] Kemperdick, "A Sculptor in Würzburg," 76. Kemperdick notes, "even in cities like Würzburg, where guilds were not officially sanctioned, the crafts were organized in structures similar to those of guilds and had their own rules and regulations."

recorded among twenty-eight glaziers and twenty-seven painters.[100] Much of Riemenschneider's success is due to his well-established style and his ability to pass this style along to his assistants. It was this practice that allowed him to produce a high volume of skillfully worked sculptures at very reasonable prices.[101] Riemenschneider's artistic styles and physiognomies are so clearly defined and replicable by journeymen, that they are easily executed in various materials, colored or not. Riemenschneider produced sculptures in alabaster, several types of stone, and limewood and his figures are consistent throughout.[102] Most significantly, Riemenschneider mastered monochromatic sculpture, which is an artistic feat in and of itself since he had to make up in carving for what color would have provided. Without color there needs to be a new means for the artist to communicate texture and modeling by working up dark and light areas within the figure. The viewer, when before a monochrome sculpture, must first recognize the material and then analyze the figure represented.[103]

Riemenschneider was looking to Schongauer's prints to develop his typologies and compositions. Riemenschneider's break with polychrome is sometimes associated with the popularity of prints in Germany at this time.[104] Notably, black and white woodcuts were

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[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid., 78.
[102] Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 21-23. Kalden-Rosenfeld notes that there is record of Riemenschneider employing stonemasons; particularly three in 1508,"to work on the Tabernacle for the high altar." This commission was for the cathedral in Würzburg, and since stone masons are a part of another guild Riemenschneider probably had to, "seek permission from the episcopal council and/or the confraternity in order to employ the stonemasons." The tabernacle was destroyed in 1701, but it combined stone and wooden sculpture. Reconstruction renderings depict a marble base with a wooden structure above, where "both base and upper structure incorporated figures carved of limewood."
For the original archive document see: Bier, "St. Andrew," *The Art Bulletin* 38, no. 4 (1956): 216. Cf. Bier, *op.cit.,* 1930, p. 179, doc. 89 of December 12, 1508: "dan er itzt drey steynmetzen hab" (since he has now three mason).
[103] Baxandall, "The Perception," 97.
[104] Lynn F. Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces, 1380-1550: Medieval Tastes and Mass Marketing*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 242. See also Eike Oellermann, "Der Hochaltar in St. Martin Zu Lorch Am Rhein," in *Flügelaltäre Des Späten Mittelalters*, ed. Hartmut Krohm and Eike Oellermann, 9-22. Berlin: Staatliche Museen, 1992, 17-19 and Bernhard Decker, "Reform within the Cult Image: The German Winged Altarpiece before the Reformation," in *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance*, ed. Peter Humfrey and Martin Kemp, 90-105, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 101. The arguments that stipulate prints lead to the development of monochromatic sculpture are varied and numerous among scholars. For the purposes of this paper I

increasingly not colored and engravings (especially those by much admired masters like Schongauer) were almost always left black and white. More remarkable than Riemenschneider's use of prints as a source of inspiration, though, is his sophistication in adapting Schongauer's exemplary work as an engraver to his own medium of sculpture. His ability as a translator of the graphic arts reveals something of his stylistic aspirations and his technical skill. In copying Schongauer's complex engravings Riemenschneider translated and reformulated the two-dimensional prints into his limewood work in relief and even his sculpture in the round. This ability as an expert translator allowed him to develop a means of using carving to establish color, modeling, and texture to convey pictorial effects in sculpture without using paint. In the words of Fritz Koreny, "Tilman Riemenschneider was a master of adaptation."[105] His own work in relief is comparable to that in carefully worked and small scale engravings, which provides a remarkable testament to his sensitivity to the pictorial possibilities of line and shadow and to his outstanding abilities as a carver.

Not only does the Münnerstadt altarpiece reveal the inspiration of Schongauer, it also shows that Riemenschneider's ability to utilize what he learned in multiple mediums was matched by his ability to sculpt both a figure in the round and in relief. Riemenschneider's figures in the round exemplify his specific typologies that are reminiscent of Schongauer, but his sculpture in relief exemplifies Riemenschneider's artistic ability in translating the graphic arts into sculpture. The wings of the Münnerstadt altarpiece, sculpted in relief, depicts scenes from the life of Mary Magdalene; the *Noli Me Tangere* clearly demonstrates Riemenschneider's dependence on Martin Schongauer (Figures 24 and 25). Though Riemenschneider uses, even

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am neither supporting nor disproving the correlation between black and white prints and monochrome, but rather recognizing Riemenschneider's unique approach to sculpting without color.

[105] Fritz Koreny, "Riemenschneider and the Graphic Arts," *Studies in the History of Art* 65, (2004):104.

imitates, Schongauer's composition, the elements of the figures and the setting have been reworked to give the scene an emotional quality that is not found in the engraving.[106] Rather than depicting the isolated interaction between two figures, Riemenschneider has developed a more narrative scene. Krohm notes that the *Noli me Tangere* requires prolonged observation to appreciate the scene which was unusual for a wing relief of the late Gothic period.[107] Riemenschneider has shown Christ confronting Mary Magdalene in the foreground, while Christ's disciple Peter sleeps in the background. A picket fence encloses the figures of Mary and Christ in a space of rolling hills with grass expressed in small hatch marks. Riemenschneider has clothed Christ and Mary in heavy drapery and geometric folds that, from a distance, communicate dark and light. In exchange for color, the highly textured relief creates pictorial depth by situating the grass, executed in hatch marks, next to the smooth drapery of the figures.[108] Both the Magdalene figure and Christ seem to emerge out of the drapery but Riemenschneider balances this effect of billowing fabric with carefully articulated anatomy. The Christ figure in particular is exemplary of Riemenschneider's ability to negotiate craftsmanship and material. Within the confines of this relief, the Christ figure combines both deeply carved drapery, but also a delicate human form. The shadows cast by the folds of his drapery to the left of his knee enhance the beautiful outline of his body, starting from the left ankle up to his ribs. Riemenschneider has managed to create the same shadows with the body as with the drapery that surrounds it. Roughly half of Christ's body is exposed, but Riemenschneider's carving allows the viewer to imagine the rest of the body and its potential for stepping out of the drapery fully

[106] "Catalogue," ed. Julien Chapuis, 221.
[107] Krohm, "The Sources," 63.
[108] Marincola, "The Surfaces," 212.

formed. The anatomical specificity is evident in every detail, even Christ's exquisitely carved veins.

Riemenschneider's carefully executed composition establishes the tense moment between movement and restraint; though the Magdalene reaches towards Christ, they do not touch, rather, as Krohm suggests, this pose establishes a spiritual connection.[109] Unlike Schongauer, whose figures are level (Chapuis calls them statuesque) these carved figures are uneven with apparently unsteady poses.[110] In this way Riemenschneider differentiates his work from the two dimensional print by employing line and shadow to create just as much depth, perhaps more, than the print. Riemenschneider has successfully imitated the pictorial effects of Schongauer's engravings.[111] Without the ability to create the nuanced, even coloristic, tones of an engraving, this relief carving communicates texture and tonality with light and shadow, an effect largely created with the sharp folds of drapery. The execution of drapery in the Late Gothic era is characterized by sharp angularity which originated in the work of Netherlandish painters.[112] In this comparison Riemenschneider and Schongauer convey the same nuanced effect by different means. For Riemenschneider, "carving emphasizes the arrangement of folds, engraving underscores the relief like shapes of a specific drapery motif."[113]

The Dettwang altarpiece (c. 1505-08) is yet another example of Riemenschneider's expertise in carving limewood (Figure 26). The wing reliefs, especially the *Resurrection*, for this altarpiece are a more dramatic translation of Schongauer prints than the Münnerstadt altarpiece (Figures 27 and 28). Unfortunately, all that remains of the Dettwang altarpiece are fragments that

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[109] Krohm, "The Sources," 63.
[110] "Catalogue," ed. Julien Chapuis, 221.
[111] Ibid., and Krohm, "The Sources," 63.
[112] Charles L. Kuhn, *German and Netherlandish Sculpture, 1280-1800*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965):15-16. This new drapery style was fully introduced in German sculpture through Nicolaus Gerhaert von Leyden.
[113] Krohm, "The Sources," 63.

were originally intended for the Michaelskepelle or chapel of Saint Michael in Rothenburg.[114] St. Michael's church was demolished in 1811 and the altarpiece was moved to Dettwang. Apparently the size of the shrine was reduced to fit the new space in the choir. Although a dark stain was applied to the fragments in the nineteenth century the wings have traces of the original glaze that matches that on the *Holy Blood Altarpiece.*[115] The sculptures date to about 1505-1508 and there are conflicting opinions as to whether the reliefs were carved by Riemenschneider himself or by assistants.[116] Regardless, the relief is characteristic of Riemenschneider's translation of a popular Schongauer print.

Here, Riemenschneider has appropriated Schongauer's *Resurrection* in terms of its composition and iconography, but his version is altogether more expressive. Christ is fully visible, rather than just stepping out of the tomb, and the figures frame the space more so in limewood than in the print. Christ's sharp folds of drapery also occupies a large area of the pictorial space. The two guards are delineated by the sharp angle of the tomb, creating a triangular composition completed by the sleeping guard in the foreground. Christ's body is elegantly revealed by the billowing garments that wrap around his hips and shoulders. Rather than explicitly express the anatomy of Christ, Riemenschneider alludes to it through the drapery. In a masterful way the angular drapery describes the soft form of the body of Christ. The Schongauer print, however, is much more explicit about anatomy. Christ's body emerges from the drapery rather with dark shadows outlining his from. In this print Christ is partially in the tomb, as he steps out and the pictorial space is much shallower than the limewood relief. Christ,

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[114] Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 90 and Bier, *Tilman Riemenschneider: His Life and Work,* 107.
[115] Bier, *Tilman Riemenschneider: His Life and Work,* 107.
[116] Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 92 and 95. Kalden-Rosenfeld argues that the reliefs are so expertly carved that they were likely done by Riemenschneider with only some areas done by assistants but, Justus Bier, in his 1982 publication, argues that the reliefs were done by apprentices.

in limewood, appears less iconic than Schongauer's figure, and much more available to the contemplation of the viewer.

Riemenschneider's ability to sculpt a contemplative scene is just as successful in establishing a readable image with complex figural relations. Take for instance his *Lamentation* altarpiece (1519-22), carved in sandstone and now in the Cistercian convent at Maidbronn (Figure 29).[117] About ten figures are sculpted in a 30cm deep relief.[118] Riemenschneider's carving, even in stone, replicates the same use of light and shade as his relief work in limewood. Since visual and tactual sensibilities are closely linked, this exceptional sculpture convinces the viewer that the figures are complete three dimensional figures.[119] The same effect is obtained in the work of both Martin Schongauer and Rogier van der Weyden. Riemenschneider was most likely familiar with the work of van der Weyden since it was available through the prints of Schongauer and others. Van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross* (before 1443) is particularly similar to the effect that is created in Riemenschneider's *Lamentation* (Figure 30).[120] In van der Weyden's oil painting the effect is sculptural. The emphasis on light and shade within the space of the scene and the figures themselves is reminiscent of a crowded altarpiece corpus. With Riemenschneider's *Lamentation* he has simulated the graphic arts, but also evokes sculpture in the round in the relatively shallow space. Both van der Weyden and Riemenschneider render different textures, create compositional space, and use drapery to effectively articulate the figures.[121] Riemenschneider's *Lamentation* retable is worthy of the term for Late Gothic

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[117] Ibid., 115.
[118] Bodo Buczynski, "Niclaus Gerhaert Von Leiden and Tilman Riemenschneider as Stone Sculptors," *Studies in the History of Art* 65, (2004): 177
[119] L.R. Rogers, *Relief Sculpture,* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974): 147, "If the work appeals to out tactual imagination and sensibilities, it must do so entirely through our eyes by means of visually represented tactual properties."
[120] Krohm, "The Sources," 62.
[121] Kuhn, *German and Netherlandish Sculpture,* 16.

altarpieces often referred to as "sacred theatres."[122] The effects of chiaroscuro in his congested relief create a theatrical space that demonstrates Riemenschneider's understanding of Schongauer's black and white prints and van der Weyden's sculptural painting.[123]

Rather than attribute prints as the inspiration for Riemenschneider's monochrome simply because they were a black and white medium, one can fist acknowledge that his sculptural practice is much more complex in method and does not necessitate color nor is it only understandable in monochrome. The translation from black and white prints to Riemenschneider's monochrome sculptures is both thoughtful and intentional beyond the practicality of copying Schongauer or any other black and white prints that he may have seen. By developing a specific typology for figures and carving in such a way that was dependent on the effect of light and shade, Riemenschneider's compositions considered monochrome at the beginning of their creation. Riemenschneider employed monochrome to better advertise his skillful carving and his recognizable typologies.

[122] Rogers, *Relief Sculpture*, 164.
[123] Ibid., 159.

Chapter III: Sculptural Antecedents

Riemenschneider most likely learned to sculpt as an apprentice in the cities of Strasbourg and Ulm. Both cities had vibrant artistic communities in the sixteenth century. Strasbourg in particular attracted a following of stonemasons because of the fifteenth-century construction of the cathedral.[124] The Netherlandish sculptor Niclaus Gerhaert von Leyden's stay in Strasbourg brought a new dimension to the local art production that seems to have had an impact on Riemenschneider's work. Hartmut Krohm argues that distinctive characteristics in Gerhaert's work such as dimensionality, spatial presence, and a type of veiling and unveiling are also found in Riemenschneider's sculpture.[125] In Ulm, Riemenschneider would have come in contact with the work of the late master, Hans Multscher (1400 -1467) as well as Multscher's student and Riemenschneider's contemporary, Michel Erhart.[126] It is hard to overestimate Multscher's influence on German sculpture; much sculptural production of the mid- to late fifteenth century starts with Hans Multscher. Michael Baxandall has argued that with Multscher we witness a change in artistic classification whereby sculpture acquired its place in artistic production. Riemenschneider, working in Würzburg, was geographically positioned to draw inspiration from both Strasbourg and Ulm and likely apprenticed in either or both cities before becoming a master. This relationship is nicely illustrated in the newly renovated Bode Museum or the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin where the curators of the Late Gothic Southern Germany sculpture gallery have thoughtfully arranged a Riemenschneider, Gerhaert, and Multscher sculpture in such close proximity (Figure 31). Their point is well made.

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[124] Hartmut Krohm, "The Sources of Riemenschneider's Art." In *Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Julien Chapuis (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1999): 48.
[125] Ibid., 48-49.
[126] Ibid., 57.

Fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century sculpture was largely the production of craftsmen contracted to churches; for the most part their material was limited to stone. Sculpture was not in this period seen as an art form and the craftsmen, no matter how talented, were classified as 'sculptors.' In the 1420s and 30s, as Michael Baxandall observes, "lively influences began to come more from the west." [127] Burgundian-Netherlandish sculpture was imported into Germany, starting with alabaster sculptures and then whole altarpieces. New western subject matter influenced altarpiece production and "echoes" of Rogier van der Weyden found their way into German sculpture.[128] Regardless of what style influenced artistic production, fifteenth-century German sculpture developed its own character and style and that in turn helped to establish sculpture as a profession. In the Late Gothic period, from about 1440 – 1520, there was a substantial shift away from feudal lords and strengthened allegiance to an increased prominence of the emperor. A rising middle class and new affluent burghers and guilds allowed for more patrons of art.[129] In this setting individual sculptors with strong personalities and styles started their own workshops and joined local guilds.[130] Baxandall argues persuasively that "these changes in the nature of the trade, changes in the kinds of patron, commission and craft structure, were a preparation for the dominant professional circumstances of the later fifteenth-century artists."[131]

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[127] Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 12.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Charles L. Kuhn, *German and Netherlandish Sculpture, 1280-1800*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965): 13. Also see Ernest Bax, *German Society at the Close of the Middle Ages* (New York: A. M. Kelley Publishers, 1967): 19-20, for an examination on the emerging German middle class and social relations that could have impacted art patronage.
[130] Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors*, 12 and Kuhn, *German and Netherlandish Sculpture,* 13.
[131] Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors*, 12.

The fifteenth and sixteenth century, specifically in southern Germany where limewood is plentiful, also saw an explosion of carved wooden altarpieces. Some of Germanys most intricate and impressive sculptures were created during this period with numerous sculptors who contributed to this Late Gothic trend. The uniform structure of limewood favors carving since the fibers are evenly arranged and the annual rings of the wood have little difference.[132] Limewood was beneficial to the sculptor, but limewood also carried a "magico-religious" interest. The *linde* in early New High German is used for 'holy grove' as well as 'limetree.' And since wood grows, changes and decays it can be thought of as living.[133] Thus, limewood was a material that was respected and particularly revered for sculpture. Limewood is imperative to Riemenschneider's style of monochrome. Michael Baxandall states that Riemenschneider's forms are, "the forms natural to limewood, because they are designed to be easy in it" and further explains that his work is half representation and half a conversation with the material.[134] Regardless of the wood's magical properties, Riemenschneider's work in limewood is incredibly thoughtful and conjures more of an intellectual or internal response that differs greatly from his predecessors.

Riemenschneider's predecessor Hans Multscher (1400-1467) was positioned to take advantage of these changed social circumstances and preference for limewood carvings and successfully established himself in Ulm. His workshop became a model for what German sculptural production would become in the latter half of the fifteenth century. Multscher's 'formula,' as argued by Peter Barnet, combined realism with a new sense of emotion and expression that set him apart from previous traditions in sculpture.[135] Baxandall points out the

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[132] Ibid., 33-34.
[133] Paul Binski, *Gothic Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019): 131.
[134] Michael Baxandall, *South German Sculpture 1480-1530*, (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1974): 18.
[135] Peter Barnet, "Late Gothic Wood Sculptures from Ulm," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 64, no. 4 (1989): 30-33.

possible source for this new formula is that Multscher most likely trained in Burgundy or at least had a direct experience with Burgundian sculpture; in 1427, though, he set up permanent residence in Ulm. His large workshop also produced paintings and "was the source of much of the best sculpture of the period in south Germany, in both stone and wood."[136] Thanks to his prolific workshop, much of the later fifteenth century sculptural production is described as "Multscheresque."[137] Take for instance the Multscher work shown in the Bode Museum gallery; this work *The Elevation of Mary Magdalene* from 1430 (of walnut wood that was carved in high relief and polychromed) is most expressive in the faces of the Magdalene and the angels that lift her up to heaven (Figure 32).[138] With each angel joyfully looking off in different directions and the Magdalene's head slightly tilted, Multscher has altered what could have been an iconic depiction of the Magdalene into a form with more expression. When compared to Riemenschneider's Magdalene there are obvious differences, but the Ulm school is defined by Multscher's workshop and his successors, so it is worth exploring the lineage of the Ulm sculptors. Riemenschneider's monochrome Magdalene has a more clearly defined figure, whereas Multscher's Magdalene is encased in her hair. Compositionally, Riemenschneider's sculpture in the round allows for more light and shadow by distancing the angels from the Magdalene (Figure 19). Multscher has clasped the saint's two hands, where Riemenschneider allows space between them. Multscher's work is overall much more confined and heavy as a form, whereas Riemenschneider has achieved a refinement that uses monochrome to portray a more weightless, levitating Magdalene ascending into heaven. Little survives of Multscher's

[136] Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors,* 12.
[137] Ibid., 13.
[138] Hartmut Krohm. Museum label for work, "The Elevation of Mary Magdalene," Bode-Museum, Berlin. Accessed March 10, 2020.

larger commissions, but the work of his successor Michel Erhart illustrates this new found freedom among sculptors in Southern Germany.

Michel Erhart was active in Ulm from 1469 – 1522.[139] His work shows an expansion of Multscher's sculptural style. For instance, one of Erhart's *Virgin and Child* sculptures features sweeping folds in the drapery and a sense of movement in the figure (Figure 33). Here, the Christ Child interacts with the viewer, rather than with the Virgin; the Virgin, herself, looks out at the viewer. Riemenschneider's *The Virgin and Child on the Crescent Moon* at Dumbarton Oaks shares some aspects with Erhart's Madonna, although he invests this conventional motif with a new sense of ephemerality (Figure 34).[140] Riemenschneider's Virgin and Child is carved in the round; the type possibly functioned as a prototype or model in Riemenschneider's workshop.[141] The Christ child in this composition reaches out and interacts with the viewer as in the Erhart example, but here exceptionally he is clothed. Bier makes an intriguing point about the position of Virgin's hands, her left hand secures the Child on her hip, but her right hand rests on her garment. This was an innovative treatment of the Virgin by Riemenschneider and a detail that is not found in other images of the Virgin and Child.[142] Similarly, the hand of the Virgin that supports the Christ child presses into his thigh and the flesh reacts to her touch with a slight depression in His skin.[143] Collectively, Riemenschneider's work possesses a wholly new quality of life and softness compared to that of Erhart. Riemenschneider, however, does not entirely

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[139] Barnet, "Late Gothic Wood Sculptures from Ulm," 33.
[140] Iris Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor and His Workshop* (Königstein im Taunus: Karl Robert Langewiesche Nachfolger Hans Köster, 2004), 119. and Justus Bier, *Tilman Riemenschneider: His Life and Work* (Lexington: The Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1982), 78-9. Bier states that the Virgin and Child sculpture was "small enough for Riemenschneider to execute on his own, … the figure serves as a fine example of the master's most personal style during his late period."
[141] Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 119, Kuhn, "Riemenschneider in the Harvard Collections," 245, and Bier, *Tilman Riemenschneider: His Life and Work,* 78.
[142] Bier, *Tilman Riemenschneider: His Life and Work,* 79.
[143] Smith, "A Fragile Legacy: Würzburg's Sculpture After Riemenschneider," 181.

diverge from the older master. Riemenschneider's apprenticeship with Erhart is certainly evident in other works, such as his sandstone *Virgin and Child* which dates to 1520 in the Liebieghaus Sculpture collections (Figure 35). This stone figure was the "house Madonna" of the Collegiate Curia of the Neumünster (New Cathedral) in Würzburg and dates to 1520.[144] The gestures of both the Erhart Virgin and Child and in Riemenschneider's version in stone are very similar. Riemenschneider's Christ Child also looks out to the viewer, but clutches his mother's cloak with both hands. Erhart's drapery is much more fluid in this instance, while Riemenschneider has given the drapery sharper, more angular folds. Riemenschneider has followed the "large enterprises" of the time that established a recognizable holy image with a devotional capacity.[145] Moreover, this sandstone Madonna from 1520 is a testament to Riemenschneider's interest in both wood and stone throughout his life.[146] From his time in Ulm, Riemenschneider had refined his treatment of the plastic form, but he also developed his own typologies that he was able to execute them in various materials. Since Riemenschneider worked in both wood and stone it is noteworthy that Gerhaert's influence is much more evident in the limestone works.

Though Riemenschneider drew on the many artistic styles and forms of the Swabian region he never lost sight of his own individuality. Moreover, his distinctive artistic language was successfully rendered in different materials, regardless of whether they were polychromed or not. Riemenschneider's time spent in Strasbourg is evident from some of his earliest work, and especially his work in stone which shows the influence of Nicolaus Gerhaert von Leyden. Even more than Ulm, Strasbourg was a center for artistic production due largely because of the construction of the magnificent cathedral (begun in the 13th century, largely completed in the 15th

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[144] Liebieghaus, website. "Virgin Mary." Liebieghaus Skulpturen Sammlung, Accessed March 10, 2020. https://www.liebieghaus.de/en/mittelalter/virgin-mary.
[145] Ibid,.
[146] Bier, *Tilman Riemenschneider: His Life and Work, 79*.

century, but only finished in the 19th).[147] Gerhaert's time in Strasbourg from 1460 – 1467 contributed considerably to the city's sculptural practice.[148] The figures of Riemenschneider's early *Passion* altarpiece in particular show evidence of the time he spent in Strasbourg (Figure 3). Both groups, *Mourning Women with St John the Evangelist* and *Caiaphas and Soldiers* are remarkably similar to an alabaster group form Strasbourg that dates to 1470 (Figure 36). Though the same figures are depicted, Riemenschneider, as Hartmut Krohm suggests, has reworked them in "the language of van der Weyden and Schongauer."[149] This language points to the more expressive nature of each individual figure in the Riemenschneider group rather than the collective gaze of the Strasbourg alabasters. For instance, the *Mourning Women with St John* group all look off into different directions and the drapery, in this instance aided by gilding, unites the figures. Here, Riemenschneider has looked to established conventions, but has reworked them to accommodate his more nuanced carving style. The stone sculptures and limewood altarpieces Gerhaert produced in Strasbourg certainly had an effect on Riemenschneider and are particularly relevant to his work in stone. While Gerhaert relies heavily on textures and anatomy, Riemenschneider maintains an intellectual approach where his figures elicit a reflective response, rather than a visceral one. Riemenschneider's stone sculptures are pertinent to answering the question as to why he was able to choose between color and not-color. These works are a testament to his skill as an artist and his particular formula that he executed in various materials, with and without color.

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[147] Krohm, "The Sources," 48.
[148] Bodo Buczynski, "Niclaus Gerhaert Von Leiden and Tilman Riemenschneider as Stone Sculptors," *Studies in the History of Art* 65, (2004): 168.
[149] Krohm, "The Sources," 53-54. Krohm specifically references van der Weyden's Descent form the Cross.

In his own day Gerhaert's work stood out for its ability to convey a clear effective narrative, an ability that translated well into two dimensional arts.[150] Both Martin Schongauer and Master E.S. disseminated the work of Gerhaert by means of engravings which circulated widely across Germany.[151] These engravings made Gerhaert's style accessible in many regions, but it is in cities where Gerhaert worked that sculptors were most strongly influenced by his style.[152] The time Riemenschneider spent in Strasbourg would certainly have made him familiar with Gerhaert and Netherlandish art, perhaps even with the work of Rogier van der Weyden, available through Schongauer's prints which were very much influenced by the Netherlandish master.[153]

Certainly, Riemenschneider's stone sculptures suggest his possible training in Strasbourg and his knowledge of Gerhaert's work. In 1460 Gerhaert was commissioned to decorate the portal and façade of Strasbourg's newly constructed chancellery.[154] The work that Gerhaert produced for Strasbourg foregrounds some of the characteristics that are also to be found in Riemenschneider's sculpture. This despite that the two sculptors did not share the same aesthetic vision.[155] The two also varied greatly in the surface treatment of their sculpture.[156] Nonetheless examining the antecedents of Riemenschneider's stone sculpture in relation to Gerhaert makes it clear that certain aspects of Gerhaert's work were likely inspirations for Riemenschneider's works.

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[150] Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors*, 13-15.
[151] Ibid., 15 and Kuhn, *German and Netherlandish Sculpture,* 16.
[152] Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors*, 15.
[153] Krohm, "The Sources," 52.
[154] Ibid., 48 and Buczynski, "Niclaus Gerhaert," 168.
[155] Ibid, 171.
[156] Ibid, 167 and 177.

Gerhaert's sandstone *Epitaph of Canon Konrad von Busang,* signed and dated 1464, is located in the Saint John Chapel of the Strasbourg Cathedral (Figure 37).[157] In this work Gerhaert plays with the surface of stone; the unpolished stone surface evokes the textures and skin of the figures, an effect similar to the articulated wrinkles in his more famous *Bust of a man* (Figure 38).[158] Gerhaert achieved these various effects of texture by leaving the marks of his chisel evident in the stone.[159] This differentiated articulation of texture creates a kind of mimesis between the figures and the surface of the stone. The surface of the stone describes the figures, but also imitates life by mimicking the various textures of skin and garments. Bodo Buczynski points out that the Virgin's veil alone is exemplary of this complex treatment, "its outer surface shows the finely riffled structure of a flat chisel, whereas the interior was given a rougher texture with a toothed chisel."[160]

Gerhaert's influence on Riemenschneider's carving technique is perhaps best exemplified in his limestone sculptures of *Adam* and *Eve* on the south portal of the Lady Chapel at Würzburg (Figure 39).[161] The sculptures on the outside of the church were to replace the previous Adam and Eve from 1420/30 and Riemenschneider received the commission in May of 1491 (Figure 40).[162] Both figures were to be life size and the contract specifies, "three fingers higher than Master Tyll."[163] Riemenschneider has gracefully rendered the first couple with a delicate weightlessness and fluidity. Adam, who occupied the left side of the portal, leans slightly out to

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[157] Ibid, 169.
[158] Ibid, and Krohm, "The Sources," 60-61.
[159] Buczynski, "Niclaus Gerhaert," 169.
[160] Ibid, 170.
[161] Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 46.
[162] Ibid, See Justus Bier, Tilman Riemenschneider, Die frühen Werke, Würzburg, 1925, pp. 99f., doc 15. "Riemenschneider received 60 guilders for each one of the two figures. In this case the price included bracket, canopy, stone, and installation" in Bier, "St. Andrew," *The Art Bulletin* 38, no. 4 (1956): 216 and 217.
[163] Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 47.

the left and Eve leans out on the right.[164] Their contrapposto poses are heightened by the extending legs and arms that invest the figures with movement and life. What is so unique in these sculptures that differs from Riemenschneider's limewood altarpieces is their occupation in space. We can more clearly see his sculptural sophistication with two free standing figures unimpeded by a background or confined to an altarpiece shrine. Perhaps because of this visible setting, these two life-sized bodies clearly show the influence of Gerhaert on Riemenschneider.[165] Both Hartmut Krohm and Buczynski agree that Gerhaert's influence on Riemenschneider was more intellectual than aesthetic. Meaning that Gerhaert's approach to the figure with clearly defined anatomy and unfinished surfaces does not allow for the introspective impression that Riemenschneider's work conveys. Riemenschneider's figures allow the viewer an internal reflection through the figure's expressive gestures and faces, rather than the surface of the material. This approach reinforces that Riemenschneider's aesthetics are close to those of Martin Schongauer and Rogier van der Weyden.[166] Riemenschneider, however, has certainly employed the same expressiveness and movement found in both Gerhaert's *Bust of a Man* and his *Epitaph of Canon.* In the same way that Gerhaert's technique imitates surfaces, Riemenschneider's works strive for that same mimetic effect of life, but through a high finish. The polished stone of Riemenschneider's Adam and Eve also suggests flesh.[167] His Adam and Eve are "worked fully in the round" with no traces of carving tools.[168] Each curl on the figures, particularly Adam, were individually drilled and are freestanding, much like Riemenschneider's

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[164] Ibid. Kalden-Rosenfeld also mentions the canopies above each figure. Above Adam is the annunciation scene, which signifies the humanity of Christ, while the *noli me tangere* is above Eve connecting the first woman to the redemption of Mary Magdalene. Also Krohm, "The Sources," 52, where Krohm points out that the Virgins cloak is open to receive Christ.
[165] Buczynski, "Niclaus Gerhaert," 172, "Their almost kinetic conception as continuous bodies in space, coherent from all viewpoints, reveals Riemenschneider's debt to the Strasbourg master."
[166] Krohm, 50
[167] Krohm, "The Sources," 60. And Buczynski, "Niclaus Gerhaert," 174.
[168] Buczynski, "Niclaus Gerhaert," 173.

limewood figures (Figure 41).[169] Krohm suggests that the Adam and Eve figures, "improve on nature…who in their flawlessness seem to have regained the state of grace, are created with the stone's surface and the sublime effects of light particularly in mind."[170] Overall, Riemenschneider's stone figures are much more concerned with evoking a figure that communicates internal reflection. Gerhaert provides the general inspiration for more narrative forms, but Riemenschneider is able to expand upon Gerhaert's mode of expression. Riemenschneider does this in both stone and limewood.

For a comparison of how Riemenschneider appropriated and modified Gerhaert's stonework to his own carving in limewood, we can look to a Crucifix by each artist. Gerhaert's stone crucifix from the Stiftskirche in Baden-Baden is representative of his play of surface with an emphasis on anatomy (Figure 42). Christ's ribs are exaggerated and strong lines down the center of his legs articulate the musculature and bones structures beneath the flesh. The prism shaped arms convey a sense of twisting and in any lighting circumstance the crucifix is greatly pronounced with shadows that further emphasize the suffering of Christ. Baxandall describes Gerhaert's crucifix as one that, "made a point of space lying between the limbs of figures and could also throw out bursts of drapery, modelled in their detail with more rectilinear local forms, far from the figure itself."[171]

When Riemenschneider's limewood *Christ on the Cross* in the Steinach an der Saale parish church is compared with Gerhaert's Baden-Baden Crucifix it is apparent that Gerhaert is

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[169] Ibid.
[170] Krohm, "The Sources," 61 and 57. Also see Michel Erhart's Adam and Eve which could have also served as a model for Riemenschneider. (Attributed to Michel Erhart, *Vanitas,* c. 1480, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna).
[171] Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors*, 13 and Kuhn, *German and Netherlandish Sculpture,* 16. Kuhn also defines Gerhaert's style, "his interest and talent in rendering naturalistically the textures of surfaces, his manner of suggesting reality in the spatial settings of his figures, his drapery which breaks into sharp, angular folds concealing the bodily forms beneath, all show his acquaintance with the mature work of such a painter as Jan van Eyck."

more interested in anatomy, and consequently emphasizes the humanity of Christ (Figure 43). Riemenschneider's limewood crucifix is more abstracted, the limbs and face maintain a suffering that is internal. Krohm compares Gerhaert's crucifix to Riemenschneider's Crucifix at Eisingen, parish church of St. Nikolaus, but Riemenschneider's strong typology of Christ does not falter and the principles remain the same. Krohm states, "these features evidence a nobility undiminished by suffering...the refined physical features elicit empathy, and the forlorn facial expression, reflecting distress over the sins of mankind, manifests pain."[172] At Steinach Riemenschneider shows the same command of the figure as did Gerhaert at Baden-Baden, but his Christ evokes internal contemplation. Certainly Riemenschneider replicates the same attention to anatomy, but does not employ the surface effects by which Gerhaert elicits such a visceral response. Riemenschneider has chosen to render Christ with an intact form that maintains Christ as King. His head, although downcast, only slightly expresses pain through parted lips and furrowed eyebrows (Figure 44). Christ's body, although thin, is largely intact and only suggests the anatomy beneath. Therefore, Riemenschneider's crucifixion represents a Christ of internal reflection.

Steinach is perhaps the most interesting example of Riemenschneider's crucifixes because in 1903 a cavity in the sculpture was discovered that contained a lead cube shaped casket.[173] The casket held a relic from St. Walpurgis, an eighth century abbess and missionary to Franconia, and a strip of parchment with an inscription written by Riemenschneider.[174] The inscription reads:

> Anno Domini XVC and XVI (1516). This
> image was carved by Master Dyln, of the
> Würzburg Council, and Painted by Johann

[172] Krohm, "The Sources," 59.
[173] Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 106.
[174] Ibid and "Saint Walburga." Accessed March 10, 2020. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Walburga.

> Wagenknecht, Master builder to the cathedral
> chapter, painter, citizen and councilor. This was
> at the time of the reigning Bishop Lorentz of
> the House of Bibra, and of Dean Albertus,
> Margrave of Brandenburg, Deacon Thomas De Stein.
> Tempore Maximiliani Imperatoris (during the reign
> of Emperor Maximilian).[175]

This inscription provides evidence that this crucifix was most likely carved by Riemenschneider himself, rather than by an apprentice. There was a formula for Riemenschneider's Crucifixes regardless of whether the work was done by the master's own hand.[176] Unfortunately, the polychrome by Wagenknecht, does not remain. In 1903, the sculpture was repainted and then paint layers were removed in 1938.[177] Regardless of polychromed limewood or uncolored limestone, Riemenschneider is formulating the material to convey an expression similar in form to Gerhaert, but wholly different in its effect on the viewer. Gerhaert introduced a new sense of expression in sculpture, but Riemenschneider has created figures with the same qualities but in a simpler more refined manner.

Riemenschneider's work in stone, such as the *Adam* and *Eve,* is no different than his forms in limewood. Riemenschneider had the ability to render the same style of carving in limewood, limestone, alabaster, or marble. His work in marble is best exemplified by his monument for Rudolf von Scherenberg, commissioned in 1496 and installed in the Würzburg Cathedral (Figure 45).[178] This monument is also a testament to Riemenschneider's flexibility between using or not using color. The work is only partially polychromed; here the nuanced use

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[175] Translations by Iris Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 106 – 107.
[176] See for instance Riemenschneider's Haroldsberg Crucifix, or Eisingen Crucifix.
[177] *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 107.
[178] Buczynski, "Niclaus Gerhaert," 174 and Krohm, "The Sources," 68. Riemenschneider's monument to Rudolf von Scherenberg portrays him as the second St. Kilian, the apostle of Franconia. Riemenschneider secured the commission right after the Prince-Bishop's death in 1495. The face is rendered with "mimetic precision" and again no traces of tool marks. Riemenschneider did use polychromy here, but was very thoughtful in its placement to enhance certain features such as the face, jewelry, angel and lion figures.

of color highlights specific features (Figure 46). Riemenschneider was not unique in his mastery or even his versatility with materials. Krohm comments that other great artists from this period had "equal command of wood and stone." [179] Nonetheless, it was this diverse sculptural practice among other sculptors, preceding and contemporaneous with Riemenschneider, that provided the artistic climate which allowed him to forgo polychrome when he so chose and to develop his own sophisticated style across various mediums. By focusing on Riemenschneider's monochrome, as the art historical literature so often does, the sculptural sophistication of Riemenschneider's work can be overlooked. Riemenschneider proves to be an artist who did not favor monochrome for any particular reason other than its effect in articulating his already impactful sculptures in both wood and stone.

[179] Krohm, "The Sources," 60. Krohm specifically mentions Hans Multscher, Nicolaus Gerhaert and Veit Stoss.

Chapter IV: Polychrome and Monochrome

In the early sixteenth century polychromed altarpieces still outnumbered monochrome works.[180] Riemenschneider produced both polychrome and monochrome sculptures, though perhaps because monochrome seems to highlight his exceptional ability as a carver he is most closely associated with that type. He was successful in executing his particular typologies and style in both techniques. In short, Riemenschneider was able to choose between color and no color, but monochrome came to fulfill a specific role in his sculptural practice. This choice was not solely aesthetic, but also allowed him to construct his sculptures to address the religious function for which it was commissioned. The Creglingen Altarpiece which was created to house the *Herrgottskirche* (The Lord's Chapel) relic dates to about 1508-1510 and displays the sculptor's sophisticated sculpting, refined typologies, and engaging narrative (Figure 47). It includes high and shallow relief, sculpture in the round situated in cabinetry, and free standing sculpture. At Creglingen, Riemenschneider seems to have employed the aesthetic qualities of monochrome to reinforce the religious purpose of this work. The altarpiece's monochrome forces the viewer to see this work in its entirety; this unifies the various levels of carving and creates a cohesive narrative. By seeing the work as a whole rather than one section or narrative in isolation, Riemenschneider forces the viewer to contemplate the different sections in relation to one another and in relation to the relic which the altarpiece memorializes.

The relic dates from August 9, 1384 when a local peasant found a Eucharistic wafer while plowing his field.[181] It is still not known whether this Eucharistic host had drops of blood on it, or if the blood appeared later. In either case, the counts Konrad IV and Gottfried von

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[180] Lynn Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces, 1380-1550: Medieval Tastes and Mass Marketing,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 81.
[181] Rainer Kahsnitz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006), 238.

Hohenlohe-Brauneck erected the Creglingen church over the spot where the wafer was found, after several miracles occurred in the presence of the relic. From 1448 to 1791 control over Creglingen and the Herrgottskirche was in the hands of the margraves of Brandenburg-Ansbach. The margrave appointed chaplains, who then appointed vicars to oversee the church and represent them in Creglingen. In 1503 the municipality complained to the margraves about the state of the church's chaplains and the decline in the number of pilgrims. The church's records indicate four retables in the early 1500s and this is presumably linked to the church's effort to attract more pilgrims. Riemenschneider's *Assumption of the Virgin* altarpiece for the Hergottskirche may have been one of the retables recorded in the Church's early sixteenth century but no document survives indicating its commission or patron.[182] The *Assumption of the Virgin* altarpiece is situated in the middle of the church, supposedly directly above the place where the host was discovered (Figure 48).[183] The stone altar supporting the altarpiece was erected to mark this spot in 1384, but was possibly replaced when Riemenschneider's altarpiece was installed.[184] The Creglingen altarpiece is perhaps one of Riemenschneider's most beautiful works especially since the figures interact with the innovative cabinetry design. The altarpiece features an ogee arch design that abandons the traditional rectangular shaped winged corpus like that seen in the *Holy Blood Altarpiece.* The superstructure of the Creglingen Altarpiece features a "chapel-like niche for the coronation of the Virgin" (Figure 49).[185] Iris Kalden-Rosenfeld has argued that the cabinetry and architectural framework is from Riemenschneider's workshop or at the very least was commissioned /overseen by him personally. This argument is based on the

[182] Ibid.
[183] Iris Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor and His Workshop* (Königstein im Taunus: Karl Robert Langewiesche Nachfolger Hans Köster, 2004), 80.
[184] Kahsnitz, *Carved Splendor,* 239.
[185] Ibid.

way in which the tracery accommodates the figures and emphasizes a central axis. The chapel-like shrine engages the viewer, drawing the eye upward to the coronation of the Virgin.[186] The altarpiece is entirely unpainted with the exception of the figure's eyes.[187]

The use of monochrome throughout the work helps to unify the narrative, despite the altarpiece's great height. Below the superstructure, the central shrine of the altarpiece depicts the Virgin Mary's Assumption (Figure 50).[188] The altar is dedicated to the Corpus Christi, "but the only reference to this dedication in the pictorial program of Riemenschneider's altarpiece is the Man of Sorrows."[189] The main corpus depicts the Virgin Mary ascending into heaven while disciples and other religious figures crowd beneath her. Mary is an elegant example of Riemenschneider's female type that was seen in the Münnerstadt altarpiece. Interestingly, Riemenschneider has chosen to have the Virgin's assumption take up the space of the central shrine, while the coronation is situated in the superstructure above. Since the thirteenth century and into the fourteenth century altars dedicated to the Virgin usually had the Coronation scene in the main corpus.[190] In Riemenschneider's *Assumption of the Virgin,* Mary is accentuated by drapery and levitates among five angels. Her drapery sweeps upward as she ascends, while the drapery of the figures below cascades downwards.[191] Mary's oval face is similar to Riemenschneider's other female figures, but despite her familiar facial features he has sculpted her in a strong contrapposto pose with deep folds in the drapery. She appears to float among the angels regardless of her attire. The angels too, help with this illusion. All five angels have their

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[186] Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 80.
[187] Kahsnitz, *Carved Splendor,* 244.
[188] Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 80. Kalden-Rosenfeld states that this is the "first time the assumption of the Virgin is made the subject of the central shrine of a carved wooden altarpiece."
[189] Ibid, and Kahsnitz, *Carved Splendor,* 242. Kashnitz notes, "the remainder of the pictorial program is wholly devoted to Mary as co-patron."
[190] Kahsnitz, *Carved Splendor,* 240.
[191] Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 84.

wings extended suggesting movement and urgency. The small lancet windows in the back of the cabinetry add light to the corpus which helps to reinforce the effect of Mary's ascent into heaven.

The arrangement of the figures in the corpus is very pictorial and quite theatrical. The levitating Mary is accentuated by the figures below who are clustered in both corners of the cabinetry which aids in the monumentality of the scene. The two groups of apostles are separated by an empty space below the Virgin, which may have once accommodated an empty sarcophagus, in accordance with the pictorial tradition of the assumption.[192] As Mary is lifted up to heaven the figures below her are much more stationary, though they do express a variety of emotions and reactions. Of all of Riemenschneider's limewood altarpieces, the corpus of the Creglingen altarpiece arguably contains the most individualized figures. The carefully individualized disciples express various forms of grief and contemplation (Figure 51).[193]

In the corpus of the monochrome Creglingen Altar, Riemenschneider employs his characteristic carving rather than polychromy to make the figures just as expressive and emotional (Figure 50). The figures on the right can be identified as Saint John, who kneels at the Virgin's feet with hands in prayer, and Saint James with a book in his hands.[194] St. John with his neck craned upwards, his pursed lips, and wide-eyes is perhaps the most expressive figure. Moreover, compared to the figures around him, John's pose seems to tighten his facial features as he stares upward, amplifying the intensity of his gaze and subsequently the effect of his grief over the death of Mary. The remaining figures on the right side are mostly differentiated by age. Some figures have longer, thicker beards; their age mostly suggested by the number of lines

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[192] Kahsnitz, *Carved Splendor,* 241.
[193] Kahsnitz, *Carved Splendor,* 243. Kahsnitz states, "The direction of their gaze varies from head to head, including every possible attitude between enraptured adoration of the vision above them to eyes cast down in reverent meditation."
[194] Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 84.

beneath their eyes. Riemenschneider accentuates the figure's features, thus making their identity and expressions legible at a greater distance. On the left the beardless apostle has been identified as Philip, with Bartholomew in front, and Peter and Paul paired closest to the center. Facial muscles cast subtle shadows while lines on the forehead and around the eyes enhance their emotional reaction. In these figures Riemenschneider's sculpted veins are quite visible. This feature invests the unpolychromed wood with an element of life that is lacking in polychrome sculpture. The eyes of the sculpted figures, however, are all painted with simple black pupils and light brown irises. The gray and black paint accentuates the eyes, eyelids, and eyebrows and red touches highlight the nostrils and lips.[195]

With the Creglingen altarpiece Riemenschneider has executed the same typologies that can be seen in the Münnerstadt and Holy Blood altarpiece. In addition, this altarpiece combines several types of sculpture—relief, sculpture in the round, and sculpture placed within an architectural space—within the same narrative, all centered on the life and death of the Virgin. The wing reliefs that frame the central corpus incorporate scenes that together with the corpus and superstructure make up the seven joys of the Virgin and depict the life of the Virgin before and after the birth of Christ (Figure 52).[196] The Visitation, Annunciation, Nativity, and Presentation in the Temple flank the assumption of the Virgin. As is the case with the Münnerstadt Altarpiece, Riemenschneider has again reworked the prints of Martin Schongauer. The Annunciation relief draws upon both Schongauer's *The Annunciation: The Angel Gabriel* and *The Annunciation* prints (Figures 53 and 54).[197] However, like the Münnerstadt example he has reworked the scene and the figures to accommodate the limewood material and the narrative

[195] Bier, *Tilman Riemenschneider: His Life and Work,* 101.
[196] Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 83-4.
[197] Ibid., 84.

of the whole altarpiece. Along with the wing's shallow relief, the predella features high reliefs; *Adoration of the Magi* and *Twelve Year Old Christ Among the Doctors* as well as a central relief with two angels holding up a cloth.[198] This central scene would have framed the monstrance with the host on the altar.

Within this altar there are many levels, of both depth and height. This is especially evident in the superstructure where Riemenschneider has created a space, almost like another corpus, to complete the narrative with the *Coronation of the Virgin* and the freestanding figure of *Christ as the Man of Sorrows* (Figure 49). Mary, lifted to heaven, is crowned by God the father, Christ and the Holy Ghost. She is enveloped in drapery and kneeling. Christ and God the Father look towards Mary while she looks out at the viewer. This dynamic reinforces the main theme of the Altarpiece. Since Mary is at the center she becomes the sole focus as mediator in relation to the divine presences around her. To a sixteenth-century audience, this image of Mary lifted to heaven and crowned by the Trinity would have communicated the hope for life after death and Mary's role as an intercessor between man and God.[199] Placed within the spiraling tracery of the superstructure, Christ as the Man of Sorrows magnifies the grand height of the altarpiece. The sculpture of Christ is not typical of Riemenschneider's figures. His body lacks much of the detail that is generally seen and he appears quite bulky. Christ's musculature is minimally accentuated, but this treatment of the body allows the figure to be read more easily from the viewer's standpoint below. This, I think, is a testament to Riemenschneider's ability to negotiate all aspects of the commission, including the themes, vantage points, and setting.

Without paint Riemenschneider unifies several layers of sculpture and narrative in a way that was quite innovative by the standards of Late Gothic Altarpiece production. This innovation

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[198] Ibid., 83.
[199] Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 84.

stands out when the Creglingen Altarpiece is compared to Michel Erhart's Blaubeuren Altarpiece (Figure 55). This comparison is especially telling since Erhart's altarpiece is comparable to Riemenschneider's; it too features several levels. Though the Blaubeuren Altarpiece has several levels both in terms of its sculptures (in the round, reliefs, and high reliefs) and also in terms of its narrative since it has two sets of wings with painted panels. The Blaubeuren Altarpiece was completed in 1494, it was sculpted by Michel Erhart and painted by Bartholomäus Zeitblom of Ulm.[200] This altarpiece is one of a very few Swabian retables to survive from the Late Gothic period. It serves as the high altar of the former Abbey church of St. Johannes der Täufer (Saint John the Baptist), which was consecrated in 1125.[201]

In the Blaubeuren Altarpiece as in the Creglingen Altarpiece there is a gradual increase in the forms of sculpture that culminates in the corpus as the painted panels and wings unfold.[202] The outermost panels, back of the wings and the back of the cabinetry is painted, the inside of the wings are sculpted reliefs, and the corpus features sculptures in the round. Lynn Jacobs states, "the increase in sanctity through volume is complemented both by the shift from narrative to iconic images and by the increase in figure scale from the wings to the center."[203] The main corpus displays the Virgin and Child (Virgin of the Apocalypse) at the center, they are accompanied by Sts. Benedict, John the Baptist, John the Evangelist and Scholastica at either side (Figure 56). The two wings depict relief carvings of the Nativity scene and the Adoration of the Magi (Figure 57). The predella, at the lowest level, is a sculpture of Christ and his Apostles in high relief. The superstructure features Christ as Man of Sorrows, the Virgin and St. John,

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[200] Kahsnitz, *Carved Splendor,* 180 and Bier, *Tilman Riemenschneider: His Life and Work,* 12. Bier argues that the Blaubeuren altarpiece was possibly done by the sculptor's son, Gregor Erhart who could have carved the shrine figures before leaving Ulm for Augsburg in 1494.
[201] Kahsnitz, *Carved Splendor,* 180.
[202] Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish*, 113.
[203] Ibid.

Angels holding the instruments of the passion, and busts of the Church fathers and saints (Figure 58).[204] Rainer Kahsnitz emphasizes that the altarpiece's architecture, polychromy, and gilding are very well preserved and have not been repainted or regilded.[205] Erhart's sumptuous use of color and gold creates yet another dimension for this very complicated altarpiece whereas Riemenschneider's monochrome, despite its many levels, presents itself as one coherent piece.

The wings of both the Creglingen and Blaubeuren altarpieces tell a narrative, but in very different ways. The liturgical function of the Blaubeuren altarpiece is facilitated by its double panel design.[206] On the outside of the wings is the story of Saint John the Baptist (Figure 59).[207] The outside of the other panels depict twelve scenes from the Passion. The cycle of John the Baptist dedicates a single scene to each panel, but the Passion panels have three scenes each.[208] With a double winged design, the main corpus was most likely revealed on religious holidays when both sets of wings were opened.[209] In Creglingen there is not the same cyclical function, but that was not necessarily important for an altarpiece that was meant to mark the site of a sacramental relic. Instead, Riemenschneider flanks the main corpus of his altar with scenes from the life of the Virgin which serves to glorify Mary as the vessel of God. God made flesh and so reminds the viewer of the miraculous host, whether it was Christ's body or not. The Creglingen altarpiece does not serve as a reliquary like the *Holy Blood Altarpiece* but with a monstrance

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[204] Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors*, 258.
[205] Kahsnitz, *Carved Splendor,* 188.
[206] Donald L. Ehresmann, "Some Observations on the Role of Liturgy in the Early Winged Altarpiece." *The Art Bulletin* 64, no. 3 (1982):368 and 359, "Liturgically, movable wings permitted a change of the physical appearance of the altar in broad relationship to phases of the church year."
[207] Johannes Taubert. *Polychrome sculpture. Meaning, form, conservation* (Los Angeles: Getty Trust Publications, 2015), 11.
[208] Kahsnitz, *Carved Splendor,* 183. The John the Baptist program begins with the angel Zacharias announcing the saints birth, the Visitation, Birth of the Baptist, Circumcision, John's life in the Wilderness, John preaching and baptizing, John with priests from Jerusalem, John baptizing Christ, and the remaining scenes record his beheading by Herod.
[209] Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture,* 11.

situated in front of the altar it certainly directs a pilgrim's devotion to the miraculous host it celebrates.

The German tradition of winged relief, as argued by Jacobs, helps to reduce the contrast between the corpus and the wings and helped to unify the whole altarpiece in a more cohesive manner.[210] The Blaubeuren wing reliefs are unique because they feature a painted background with sculptures in relief in the foreground (Figure 57). The polychromed relief figures combine with the painted background to create a unified whole.[211] This is quite an interesting combination of painting and painted sculpture. Benvenuto Cellini once said that, "the difference between painting and sculpture is immense; it is like the difference between a shadow and the thing that cast it."[212] Here in the Blaubeuren reliefs there is a combination of two dimensional painting and painted sculpture that neglects the ability of the plastic form to create light and shadow, so the polychrome and gilding have articulated those qualities instead.[213]

"Art" in early sixteenth-century Germany was obviously very fluid in understanding the relationships among various types of sculpture and two dimensional works as well as between monochrome and polychrome sculpture. One example, a Crucifixion scene, possibly from Cologne and dated to 1430, includes sculpted heads attached to a painted panel which exemplifies this willingness to accept hybrid forms (Figure 60). There are also unique combinations of monochrome and color within altarpieces from this period, as in Jörg Syrlin the Younger's *Alpirsbach Altarpiece* and two reliefs at the Ottobeuren Abbey Museum (Figures 61

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[210] Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish*, 112-113.
[211] Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture,* 79.
[212] Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *The Blind Spot: An Essay on the Relations between Painting and Sculpture in the Modern Age,* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008): 4.
[213] Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture,* 11, "A completely different form of tying together painting and sculpture occurs when formal principles pertaining to two-dimensional panel painting are applied to three-dimensional objects, namely sculpture."

and 62).[214] These examples suggest that patrons and viewers in sixteenth- century Southern Germany were very open to new forms of materiality and pictorial representation using both color and monochrome. Monochrome, as an aesthetic was a much broader artistic phenomenon rather than just an innovation of Riemenschneider.[215] Consequently unpainted altarpieces did not necessarily correlate to a new aesthetic but rather came about as a new mode of expression.[216] In the case of the Creglingen altarpiece, Riemenschneider left all the wood of his altarpiece consistently visible whereas Erhart's Blaubeuren altarpiece can change meaning at the flip of a panel. By choosing such a uniform finish Riemenschneider encouraged the sixteenth-century pilgrim to the *Herrgottskirche* in Creglingen to meditate on the mysteries of the Christian faith all at once; connecting the narrative from the corpus to the wing reliefs to the scenes in the superstructure above and the predella below.[217]

Riemenschneider treated his sculpted images pictorially, making up for the lack of color by carving the varied marks that just as clearly convey—though by different means—eyelids, drapery, and bulging veins. When sculpture is painted it acts to accentuate certain motifs and forms, such as the wounds of Christ or the red eyes of a lamenting John the Evangelist.[218] The use of polychrome and gilding help to establish the sanctified space of the altar, but Riemenschneider's Creglingen altarpiece does so with a cohesive narrative and pictorial

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[214] Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture,* 93. Taubert defines three groups of sculpture: the non-polychromed, half-polychromed, and the partially painted wood-colored sculptures.
[215] Fritz Koreny, "Riemenschneider and the Graphic Arts," *Studies in the History of Art* 65, (2004): 108 and 110.
[216] Krohm, "The Sources," 65. Krohm also points out that artists compensated for this lack of specifically with the use of a glaze and punch work (both of which are true of Riemenschneider's work).
[217] Protestant Parish Council of Creglingen. "Herrgottskirche." Accessed March 10, 2020. The Creglingen church currently offers an opportunity for visitors to see the altarpiece as Riemenschneider may have seen it. In the summer the church turns of all lighting from 5-6pm and visitors can view Mary ascend to heaven illuminated by natural sunlight. Though not necessarily a miracle, this certainly edifies the intended meditative aspect of the work.
[218] Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture,* 30.

carving.[219] Given the changing climate in sculptural production and the fact that a leading sculptor like Riemenschneider was able to choose monochrome suggests that the abandonment of polychrome was, for him in these instances, a deliberate and thoughtful decision. Although Riemenschneider's choice of monochrome cannot be attributed to a single reason or antecedent, I would suggest that he developed a style of carving that was not dependent on color to obtain a similar viewer response as that which polychrome and gilded sculpture facilitated. Riemenschneider's Creglingen altarpiece marks the spot of a sacramental relic and this monochrome altarpiece elicited introspective devotion from the sixteenth century pilgrim remarkably without the use of rich colors or reflective gold; it also made evident the sculptor's marvelous artistry.

[219] Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish*, 94. Jacobs states that polychromy differentiates the images from reality and suggests the images themselves were made of precious materials. This imitation of gold and gems can serve to incorporate the altarpiece with the other liturgical objects in the church space.

Chapter V: Sculptural Theology

Riemenschneider's choice of monochrome for the *Holy Blood Altarpiece* is related to the altarpiece's function (Figure 1). Like the Creglingen altarpiece, the sculptural program in Rothenberg required that Riemenschneider create a narrative that directly related to the relic contained within the structure. In this period and place such controversial relics and their popular cult following call for careful consideration of the religious situation. Consequently, the Reformation and the controversies over images it fomented, play an important part in situating Riemenschneider within his early sixteenth-century context. Riemenschneider's lifetime, 1460-1531, overlaps with the early Reformation. Martin Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses in 1517, was excommunicated in 1521, and in 1530 published the *Augsburg Confession.*[220] Given this timeline, the Reformation has been seen as important for Riemenschneider's development of monochrome sculpture.[221] I would argue, though, that while German altarpiece production in the sixteenth century certainly reflects the ongoing arguments about the role of liturgical and devotional imagery, the Reformation was not directly responsible for developing, or promoting, monochromatic altarpieces.[222] Nonetheless, the confessional disputes over the role of images make crucial to consider the possible bearing that theological questions may have had on Riemenschneider's work on *The Holy Blood Altarpiece.* Only after such an examination can we

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[220] Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe,* (New York: Routledge, 1993): 30.

[221] Lynn Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces, 1380-1550: Medieval Tastes and Mass Marketing,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 242. Also see Bernhard Decker, "Reform within the Cult Image: The German Winged Altarpiece before the Reformation," In *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance*, ed. by Peter Humfrey and Martin Kemp, 90-105. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Decker argues that the use of monochrome in German altarpieces was an attempt to neutralize the iconic nature of religious images. Decker is only one of several scholars who have made this suggestion. For the purposes of this paper I am making an argument against the generalized assumptions of Riemenschneider's possible "pre-Reformation sentiments" as the motivation for his use of monochrome.

[222] Lynn Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces, 1380-1550: Medieval Tastes and Mass Marketing,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 242.

begin to understand his choice of monochrome in this instance, and how that choice serves to highlight just one facet of his style.

The *Altarpiece of the Holy Blood*, as Joseph Koerner points out, was a reliquary, but more like a display case for a relic (Figure 5). Koerner observes that, "since the thirteenth century, Rothenburg's church of St James housed three drops of Christ's blood that miraculously came about during a celebration of Mass…Rothenburg treasured something altogether different: a remnant of Christ's *sacramental* body made present in the altar rite."[223] Koerner explains that the Rothenburg relic is unique because the droplets of blood were not transubstantiated wine, but wine that became blood. A likely scenario, put forth by Katherine Biovin, is one where a priest celebrating Mass spilled a few drops of consecrated wine onto the corporal cloth.[224] The relic itself is unique not as a historical artifact, but as a product of a miracle. As a *Dauerwunder,* or a permanent miracle, the Rothenburg blood became a relic for its miracle working powers.[225] Koerner goes on to say that the droplets, "now possessed power quite independent of the Mass, working new miracles through their physical presence in the chapel…by being built into an altarpiece, they affirmed the efficacy of sacrament."[226]

The fact that the Rothenburg relic was a sacramental relic informed Riemenschneider's approach when he sculpted the *Holy Blood Altarpiece*. The viewer's understanding of sacramental relics ultimately determined Riemenschneider's careful consideration of the narrative and the space surrounding the altarpiece. In the twelfth and thirteenth-century

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[223] Joseph Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008) 345.
[224] Katherine Boivin, "Holy Blood, Holy Cross: Dynamic Interactions in the Parochial Complex of Rothenburg," *Art Bulletin* 99, no. 2 (June 2017): 45 and Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006): 134. Wandel describes the Rothenburg relic as "eucharistic wine that had fallen onto the linen altarcloth and, miraculously transformed into Christ's blood at the words of consecration."
[225] Boivin, "Holy Blood, Holy Cross," 54.
[226] Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image,* 345.

sacraments referred to a broad range of objects that could be considered holy.[227] Twelfth-century theologians defined sacraments as something symbolic whereas the thirteenth century theologians, most importantly Thomas Acquinas, defined them in a more active sense as, "things by means of which sanctification occurred."[228] Even into the sixteenth century the definition of a sacrament was contested, but at Rothenburg the blood relic was treated as an activating power. However, to eradicate any doubts churches, as with St. James, had a solution. Caroline Bynum argues that with no clear understanding of whether the divine were present in such "transformed wine or hosts… the solution was to place a consecrated host alongside the putative miracle to assure that, whatever was present, the faithful had something worth traveling to."[229] By placing a host in front of the altarpiece whatever power that was present in the relic was reinforced with the symbolic body of Christ. With this in mind, Riemenschneider directly formulates his sculptures around the host as well as the relic for which they were intended. In the case of the *Holy Blood Altarpiece* a beardless disciple points down to the altar table where the host would have been displayed and at Creglingen two angels hold up a cloth in the predella that would have also framed the monstrance (Figure 8).

The controversial Holy Blood relic played a most important role in the fifteenth-century "blood frenzy," a term Caroline Walker Bynum used to describe the overwhelming number of pilgrimages to churches with sacramental blood relics during this period.[230] Wilsnack, one of the most popular sites for pilgrims had three bleeding hosts that were discovered intact after a fire. In August of 1383 the city was torched by a knight and the hosts were found by the priest Johannes

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[227] Robert W. Scribner, *Religion and Culture in Germany (1400-1800),* (Boston: Leiden, 2001), 92.
[228] Ibid., 91.
[229] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007): 92.
[230] Boivin, "Holy Blood, Holy Cross," 44.

Kabuz in the remains of the altar.[231] As the site that initiated and propagated this blood frenzy, Wilsnack (not surprisingly) also became the center for theological debates over the miraculous power of holy blood. As Wilsnack grew in popularity other towns sought to justify the efficacy of their relics as well. In Rothenburg a campaign to market their relic was initiated in 1442. During this time miracles were recorded relating to the Holy Blood and the West Chapel, that would eventually house Riemenschneider's altarpiece, was constructed. During this campaign a miracle was recorded that boldly claimed the Rothenburg blood was more effective than those at Wilsnack. Supposedly, a young girl from Würzburg had traveled to Wilsnack in an attempt to restore her vision but was unsuccessful. Upon praying in the Chapel of the Holy Blood in Rothenburg her vision was miraculously restored.[232] In 1467 the chantry established a new ritual of a Mass that would start at the East Choir and proceed to the West Chapel every Thursday.[233] This new emphasis on miracles and sanctification of the West Chapel space made Rothenburg a very popular pilgrimage site and this set the stage for the commissioning of Riemenschneider's *Holy Blood Altarpiece*.

The *Holy Blood Altarpiece* is dependent on the visual reception of a lay person; the altarpiece engages with both the relic that the pilgrims came to see and the space of the West Chapel that is markedly different from the rest of the Church in its elevated design. Because of this space the gaze of the viewer is integral to understanding the narrative of the altarpiece. In the Late Middle Ages a pious Christian was supposed to use images as a material aid for a more internal spiritual devotion.[234] Rothenburg's Chapel of the Holy Blood emphasized this material access and vision—expense seems not to have been spared to ensure both. The chapel was built

[231] Ibid, and Bynum, *Wonderful Blood,* 25.
[232] Boivin, "Holy Blood, Holy Cross," 44.
[233] Ibid., 54.
[234] Scribner, *Religion and Culture,* 88.

over the major thoroughfare of Klingensgasse which "ensured maximum visibility for the relic's new home."[235] Physically "passing through" the church would certainly have encouraged the populace and visitors of Rothenburg to contemplate the relic and its centrality for the city.[236] St. James's long nave also focuses on visibility. The *Holy Blood Altarpiece* can be seen from anywhere in the church, and the reliquary cross, uniquely placed in the superstructure is the most visible (Figure 63). High above the nave and facing the High altar, the three drops of blood seem to charge the space of the church with connotations of its miraculous powers. Perhaps this is why the relic was placed in the superstructure, rather than the corpus with wings that could be closed to conceal it.[237]

Since a host was placed on the altar, situated in front of Riemenschneider's predella with a Crucifix and angels holding the *Arma Christi*, the host provided ocular communion for the visiting pilgrims. Such ocular communion was banned and later reinstated in 1459 with special permission from Pope Pius II. The bishop of Würzburg also granted an indulgence for attending a service in the West Chapel and to those who donated to the church.[238] The reliquary cross that was commissioned for the blood relic was also meant to provide ocular devotion and magnify the sacrament with a large rock crystal (Figure 5). In 1502 the cross was regilded and installed along with Riemenschneider's altarpiece and an inscription that emphasized both the blood of Christ and His body, referring to the Eucharist.[239] Riemenschneider's Last Supper connects the host

[235] Boivin, "Holy Blood, Holy Cross," 52.
[236] In addition to the church's architectural emphasis on the presence of the relic, it is important to note too that the gilded cross that contains the relic would have been used in processions throughout the city. Therefore, its presence was well known to the medieval populace of Rothenburg.
[237] Since reliquaries were traditionally constructed as a cabinet like structure that could temporarily conceal a relic, it is significant that the relic is always visible in the *Holy Blood Altarpiece.*
[238] Boivin, "Holy Blood, Holy Cross," 54.
[239] Ibid, 46.

with the relic allowing, as Hans Belting so aptly puts it—"the image and relic explain one another."[240]

Riemenschneider constructed *The Holy Blood Altarpiece* in such a way as to activate the space and sensations of the sixteenth-century pilgrim. He utilized both the relic that Rothenburg had valued so highly and the Eucharist that justified it. The winged altarpiece was meant to aid devotion and sanctify the space of the Eucharist. The images, mostly of the main corpus, were meant to narrate, impress, and remind the viewer of the mysteries of Christ.[241] Riemenschneider's choice to depict the Last Supper was unique in that it was very uncommon to have it in the main corpus of an altarpiece at this time. Koerner has argued that these scenes, particularly in pre-Reformation altarpieces, are rare because they cater to local cults rather than "the general sacrament."[242] Therefore, the focus of Riemenschneider's Last Supper is the presence of Christ in the Eucharist.[243]

Especially after the theological debates surrounding blood relics the Middle Ages emphasized the "real presence" of Christ in the bread and wine of the Mass.[244] In line with a more Augustinian view, the sacraments possessed a new reality that utilized the image as divine presence.[245] Perhaps sixteenth century viewers recognized another level to Riemenschneider's *Holy Blood Altarpiece* beyond the complexities of the sculptures and the encasement*;* first the image, then the sacramental essence those images represented. As Bynum states the "Eucharistic

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[240] Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994): 301,"Images assumed the appearance of relics and in turn gained power from their coexistence with relics."
[241] Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 67.
[242] Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*, 346.
[243] Boivin, "Holy Blood, Holy Cross," 58 and Bynum, *Wonderful Blood,* 77.
[244] Bynum, *Wonderful Blood,* 77, "It was Christ literally present in the Eucharistic elements, and surrounding objects such as altar linen could absorb its power."
[245] Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 35.

presence was both object and absence; it became profoundly inner—encompassable, untouchable, unseeable."[246] Riemenschneider's composition directs the gaze of the viewer, and subsequently their understanding of the *Holy Blood Altarpiece*.

In the West Chapel pilgrims would enter through the North staircase, evidenced by the painted inscription *1453 angefangen* (1453 begun) next to the stairwell arch (Figure 64).[247] From this vantage the pilgrim would enter the chapel and immediately face Christ and the back of Judas (Figure 65). The beardless apostle to the left who points down to the altar table is also visible from this view. Placed directly above the relic, the Man of Sorrows personifies the redeeming power of the Eucharistic host by connecting the body to the blood, and to Christ's resurrection (Figure 11). Taken all together, Riemenschneider's *Holy Blood Altarpiece* connects the viewer to the Eucharist, the Eucharist to the relic, and the relic to the body of Christ as the redeeming path to salvation. The figures in the *Holy Blood Altarpiece* create a narrative that was meant specifically for the sixteenth-century pilgrim and is rooted in the visual experience of that viewer; it is a unified perspective which is made possible by Riemenschneider's expert carving in monochromatic limewood. Stylistically, the lack of color eradicates any distraction for the pious viewer, while the use of light can still inspire awe, and the deep carving makes the image readable from a distance.

Just as the *Holy Blood Altarpiece* was intended to activate a devotion dependent on vision, so too hanging Rosary altarpieces employ vision to facilitate piety. The prayers of the Rosary devotion consist of ten salutations to the Virgin each beginning and ending with an "Our Father." The rosary beads, with different sizes for the two prayers, allow someone to recite the

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[246] Bynum, *Wonderful Blood,* 87.
[247] Boivin, "Holy Blood, Holy Cross," 59. The South staircase has the painted inscription *1471 volbracht* (1471 completed).

prayers in order while keeping their eyes closed. Reciting these prayers was meant to assist meditation on the Incarnation and Passion of Christ. Over time the devotion, though it pre-dated his life, became associated with Saint Dominic (1170-1221). It became increasingly popular during the late fifteenth century though its formal cult was associated with Jakob Sprenger, the prior of the Dominican monastery in Cologne. Amid a political dispute between the archbishop and the municipality Sprenger turned to the Rosary in this time of political uncertainty and it resulted in a popular following.[248] The Brotherhood of the Rosary, started by Sprenger, spread across Germany and developed Mariolatry motifs in the visual arts along with prayers to be recited (Figure 66).[249] The Rosary was a devotional practice that stimulated new art forms that for the most part had no "established conventions, traditions or models to look to."[250] Therefore, in 1517 Veit Stoss was presented with a challenge when the chief financial officer of Nuremberg commissioned him to make a hanging rosary sculpture (Figure 67).[251] As the earliest Rosary sculpture recorded, Stoss essentially had to translate "a prayer into a sculpture."[252] The German word for rosary, *Rosenkranz,* translates to "wreath of roses" which Stoss has employed, but the central scene is the Annunciation (Figure 68). The five medallions for the Our Father prayer depicts the Christian mysteries of the Nativity, Adoration of the Magi, Resurrection, Ascension, and the descent of the Holy Spirit.[253] Taubert suggests the typical Madonna of the Rosary is "embedded in a sphere of piety and defines it" therefore Stoss' scene of the angelic salutation

[248] Johannes Taubert. *Polychrome sculpture. Meaning, form, conservation* (Los Angeles: Getty Trust Publications, 2015), 64.
[249] Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors*, 56-58.
[250] Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture,* 64.
[251] Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptor,* 271, on "March 12, 1517 Anton II Tucher the financial officer ordered a limetree to be felled in the St Sebald forest and on June 1518 the work was installed."
[252] Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture,* 64.
[253] Ibid., 66. The Medallions also represent the major church holidays (Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Ascension Day, and Pentecost)

represents "the very words that are the heart and soul of the Rosary."[254] Through the body of Mary the divine presence of God was made physical so it is appropriate that Stoss would choose the Annunciation. In 1519 Stoss was paid for supplying a *fürhanck* that completely covered the Rosary. This curtain acted like the wings of an altarpiece that were only opened on religious holidays.[255] Indeed, the incredibly heavy sculpture was lowered and uncovered several times a year to reveal the bright colors and reflective gilding.[256]

Notably, when Riemenschneider also created a hanging Rosary altarpiece, he obtained the same effect of light as Stoss without the use of color. Stoss may have initiated the sculpted Rosary, but as with his other work Riemenschneider reworks certain conventions to his own ends. Riemenschneider's *Madonna of the Rosary* was sculpted for the pilgrimage church of the *Maria im Weingarten* (Virgin in the Vineyard), Kirchberg bei Volkach in 1521 (Figure 69).[257] It was painted sometime during the seventeenth century and repainted again in the nineteenth, but conservation efforts removed the layers of paint in 1954.[258] This is yet another example of a Riemenschneider altarpiece that was intentionally left unpainted. Johannes Taubert points out that "light, air and color (stained-glass windows) stream through the framing circle of roses" (Figure 70).[259] It seems that Riemenschneider's Volkach Madonna was done by assistants who used Riemenschneider's *Virgin and Child* in the Dumbarton Oaks collection as the model.[260]

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[254] Ibid., 66 and 67.
[255] Ibid., 73.
[256] Ibid, 71. Taubert makes a point of the very well preserved paint and its play of light on the surface through the reflected windows of the church in the figure's eyes.
[257] Bier, *Tilman Riemenschneider: His Life and Work,* 109, and Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 119.
[258] Bier, *Tilman Riemenschneider: His Life and Work,* 110 and Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 119.
[259] Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture,* 65.
[260] Bier, *Tilman Riemenschneider: His Life and Work,* 110, and Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor*, 119. Kalden-Rosenfeld argues that the entire sculpture may have been done by a single journeyman because the style is consistent throughout.

Nonetheless, the sculpting of the figure is still animated and typical of Riemenschneider with the angular folds of drapery, the free right hand of the Virgin, and the expressive Christ child who reaches outward (Figure 71). Riemenschneider also displays the garland of roses with five medallions that depict the Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Adoration of the Magi, and the Death and Assumption of the Virgin.[261] On the reverse of the medallions, however, he has included the wounds of Christ. Therefore, the medallions weave together the life of Mary and of Christ which adds yet another layer to the devotion elicited by the Rosary.

Depicting a prayer, or vision, was particularly challenging. Stoss employed color to create an image that, because it was intentionally covered, heightened the iconic power of the sculptures. Riemenschneider has considered alternative mediums such as light to simulate the effects of a vision or prayer without color. Here, as in the main corpus of the *Holy Blood Altarpiece*, the windows and natural sunlight illuminate the monochrome Virgin and Child. Scholars, most especially Justus Bier, argue that because some of Riemenschneider's most important altarpieces—the Holy Blood, Creglingen, and Maidbronn Lamentation—were unpainted, this choice for monochrome reflects the sculptor's personal theology. Beir describes this use of monochrome as reflecting, "an unpretentious piety and a simple deep-seated faith that must have been at odds with much of the courtly ritual that the church had developed."[262] In a more nuanced vein, Michael Baxandall has argued that the strong local guilds and brotherhoods, such as St. Luke's, invested local patronage with a "warmer devotional framework."[263] In my view, though, it is impossible to assume what Riemenschneider's personal religious convictions might have been and even more problematic to assume that they could have dictated his art

[261] Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture,* 65.
[262] Bier, *Tilman Riemenschneider: His Life and Work,* 20.
[263] Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors*, 56.

production. As for Riemenschneider's own personal faith, the only conclusions that can be drawn is evidenced from after his death. Riemenschneider was buried in the Würzburg cathedral cemetery and his tombstone, carved by his son Jörg, depicts him holding a set of rosary beads (Figure 72).[264] If Riemenschneider died a Catholic then this suggests that his art though no doubt reflecting the controversies of his day cannot be categorized as Reformed. Though the narrative aspect of Riemenschneider's carving, as exemplified in the Corpus of *The Holy Blood Altarpiece,* would have conformed to Martin Luther's outlook on images as a means to teach the lay population, it also did not contradict Catholic belief since it so heavily relied on the relic for which it was commissioned.[265] Riemenschneider's altarpiece commissions, especially in Rothenburg and at Creglingen, show him as a practical sculptor who considered the context of the commission and addressed the liturgical and or devotional function of the piece. This is also the case with the Rosary sculpture, where again he has executed the same typologies, use of light, and clear narrative to accommodate the commission most effectively. While his use of monochrome provides a frame by which his artistry might evoke a more restrained empathy and perhaps minimize the emotional response that a mimetic polychromed image might elicit it was not motivated by any specific theological sentiment. Riemenschneider was economical in his use of familiar typologies for figures and thoughtful in the development of a narrative that inspired devotion. Monochrome was a facilitator of both of these aspects. Riemenschneider's sophisticated carving is what privileges the monochrome, the sculptor was not a theologian.

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[264] Jeffrey Chipps Smith, "A Fragile Legacy: Würzburg's Sculpture After Riemenschneider." *Studies in the History of Art* 65, (2004): 184.

[265] Scribner, *Religion and Culture*, 97. For more on Luther's stance on images see Michalski, Chapter 1: "Martin Luther: cultic abuse, religious art and Christian freedom" in *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe,* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

Conclusion: Riemenschneider the Sculptor

Riemenschneider's sculptural production shows that he was an extremely gifted carver, one with a clearly defined style and equipped with a range of artistic types and techniques. Moreover, he was expert in crafting very complex narratives that would nonetheless have been readily understood by his sixteenth-century audience. Riemenschneider had a highly developed ability to evaluate the styles of artists around him and to capitalize on the diversity of sculpture in Southern Germany. On the one hand he was a pragmatist with the artistic technique and sophistication to be able to adapt Martin Schongauer's popular and very recognizable prints to his own sculptural compositions. On the other hand, given the ways in which he reworked his contemporary and sculptural antecedents he was clearly an innovator. Most importantly, Riemenschneider was a master of materials and sculptural forms regardless of whether they were colored or not. He could achieve the same effect in sculpture in the round as in relief and was able to replicate his style in both stone and wood. Baxandall sums up this attribute succinctly, "the giving up of color by sculptors like Riemenschneider was in some ways less important for the conduct of carving than the giving up of what had gone underneath the color."[266] Even amidst the political and theological tensions of the day, early sixteenth-century Southern Germany was notably rich and diverse in its artistic production. Moreover, Riemenschneider's sculptures are so sophisticated in their narrative and style that these disturbances seem to have had little effect on his work. Monochrome, in his hands, was not a loss. In exchange for color Riemenschneider utilized light, a unifying glaze, and deep, expressive carving to elevate his figures beyond the typical Gothic altarpiece mode. Justus Bier sums up this exchange:

What compensates for these self-imposed limitations

[266] Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 44.

> of Riemenschneider's art is not only the unique refinement of the actual carving but also the new depth and intensity of spiritual and humanistic content. Looking at the faces of Riemenschneider's figures we see far more than the anonymous collective soulfulness of the typical Gothic countenance; rather we see an individual character and sensibility, an awareness of a personal destiny, reflected in each face and gesture.[267]

Ever the pragmatist, even in his monochrome works, Riemenschneider used color, albeit minimal, when the effects he sought demanded it. Nothing can replace color to give expression to the eyes, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty observes, "the gaze without pupils, the unreflecting mirror of things."[268] Painted eyes, red lips, and carved veins all communicate the life of the figure in Riemenschneider's sculptures.[269] Since he does not completely give up color by using a tinted glaze and painting facial features, Riemenschneider has essentially created his own art form, but it is, nonetheless, his manner of carving that allows monochrome to carry the weight of expression and narrative. Thus, for Riemenschneider the choice of monochrome was, perhaps, not the "aesthetic" decision noted by modern scholars but a pragmatic entirely suited to his vision of sculpture.

This paper has sought a new approach to Riemenschneider's work. By drawing attention to the fact that in the St. James church of Rothenberg, from the time of Riemenschneider's commission, a monochrome altarpiece in the west chapel has faced a polychromed high altar; from then on, this setting has displayed to anyone who came into that church the nuances of a

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[267] Justus Bier, *Tilman Riemenschneider: His Life and Work* (Lexington: The Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1982), 4.
[268] Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *The Blind Spot: An Essay on the Relations between Painting and Sculpture in the Modern Age,* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008): 72 and 91.
[269] Roberta Panzanelli, "Beyond the Pale: Polychromy and Western Art." in *The Color of Life: Polychromy in Sculpture from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. by Roberta Panzanelli (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum and The Getty Research Institute, 2008): 2. See for more information on the life-like qualities of sculpture, "color represents signs of life: the gaze becomes alive and penetrating with colored irises: a rosy complexion and pink lips imply pulsating blood and a blush of emotion."

sculptor's choice as to whether or not to color his work. This juxtaposition of these monochrome and polychrome altarpieces, in dialogue as it were, has provided me with the ideal context to examine the communication between these materials and its likely effect on the sixteenth-century viewer. My argument does not seek to privilege Riemenschneider as the inventor of monochrome, but rather to reconsider the basis for those assumptions. Perhaps Riemenschneider has been caught in the cross hairs of theology, with his artistic development seen as too contingent on the turbulent events of his time. By taking a step back from previous hypotheses and conjectures as to why Riemenschneider chose monochrome, we can better appreciate him as an artist; one who was simply developing a sculptural style that used monochrome as one facet of his much larger, more complex, and emotionally charged sculptural production.

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Images

Figure 1. Tilman Riemenschneider, *Altarpiece of the Holy Blood*, 1500-1505, St. Jakobskirche, Rothenburg ob der Tauber. Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 229.

Figure 2. Friedrich Herlin, *High Altar (Altarpiece of the Twelve Apostles)*, 1466, St. Jakobskirche, Rothenburg ob der Tauber. Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 65.

Figure 3. Tilman Riemenschneider, *Mourning Women and Saint John* and *Caiaphas and Soldiers, from the shrine of the Passion Altarpiece,* 1485, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich.

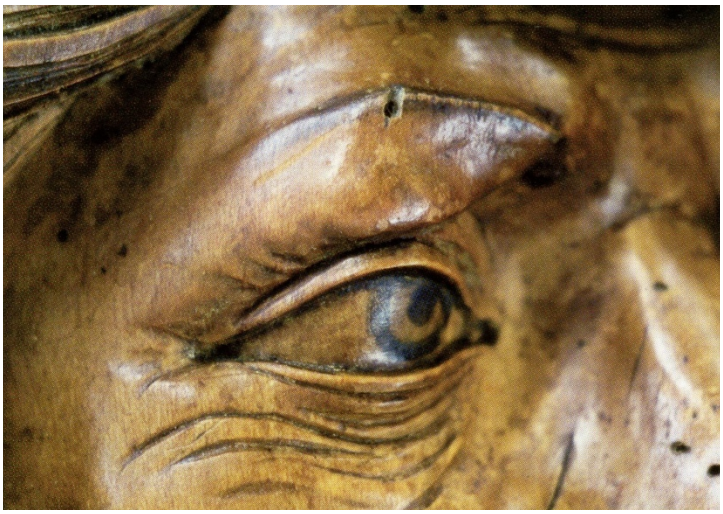


Figure 4. Tilman Riemenschneider, *Holy Blood Altarpiece* (detail), 1500-1505, limewood with monochrome glaze, St. Jakobskirche, Rothenburg ob der Tauber. Image from Eike Oellermann, "Polychrome Or Not? that is the Question." *Studies in the History of Art* 65, (2004): 114.

Figure 5. Tilman Riemenschneider, Gilded Reliquary Cross of the *Holy Blood Altarpiece,* 1500-1505, St. Jakobskirche, Rothenburg ob der Tauber.

Figure 6. Tilman Riemenschneider, Main corpus of the *Holy Blood Altarpiece,* 1500-1505, St. Jakobskirche, Rothenburg ob der Tauber. Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 231.

Figure 7. Tilman Riemenschneider, Christ, Judas, an apostle, and John from the main corpus of the *Holy Blood Altarpiece,*1500-1505, St. Jakobskirche, Rothenburg ob der Tauber. Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 230.

Figure 8. Tilman Riemenschneider, Apostle pointing to the altar, *Holy Blood Altarpiece,*1500-1505, St. Jakobskirche, Rothenburg ob der Tauber.

Figure 9. Back of the *Holy Blood Altarpiece,*1500-1505, St. Jakobskirche, Rothenburg ob der Tauber. Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 224.

Figure 10. *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem and Agony in the Garden* from the *Holy Blood Altarpiece,*1500-1505, St. Jakobskirche, Rothenburg ob der Tauber. Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 223.

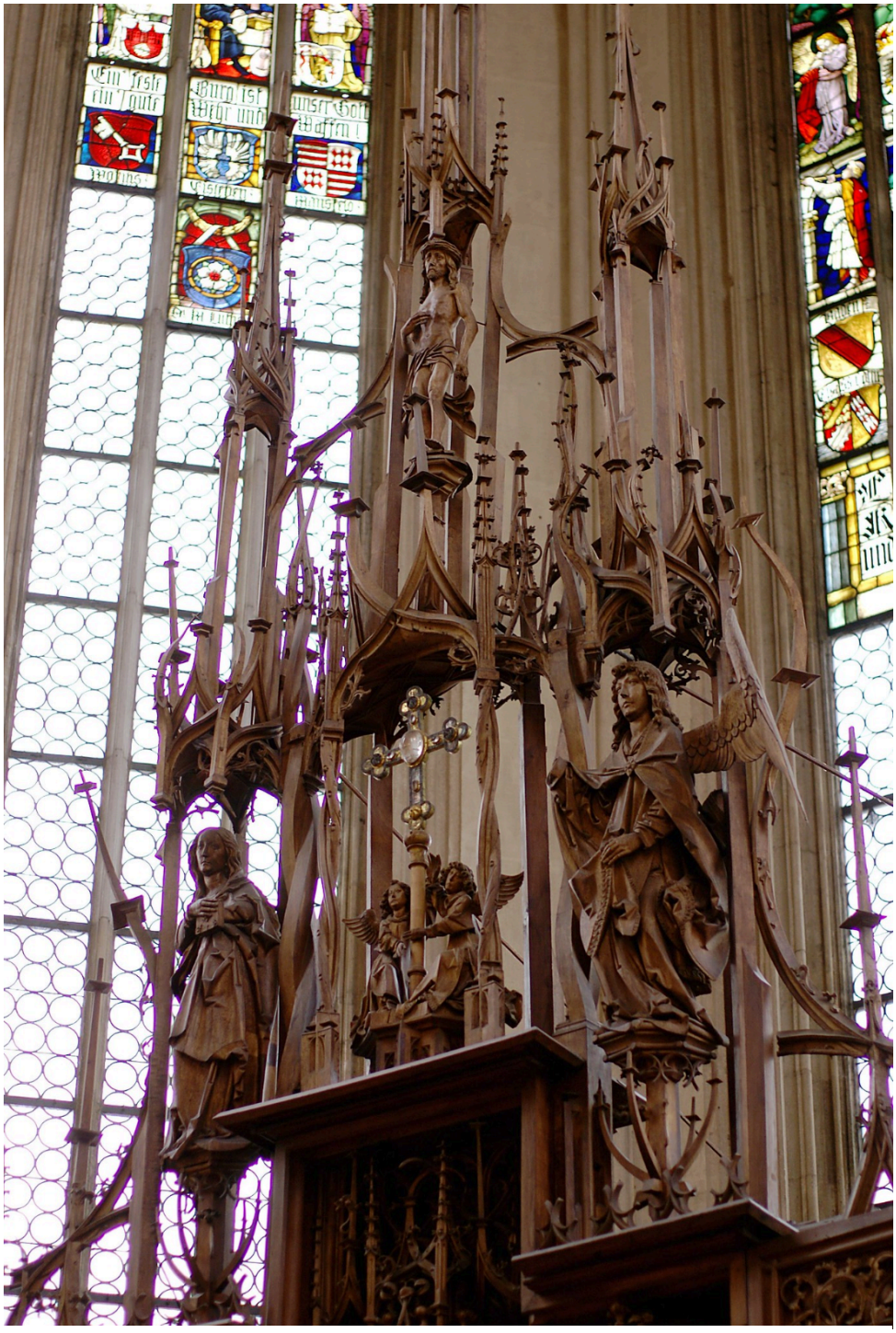


Figure 11. Superstructure of the *Holy Blood Altarpiece,* 1500-1505, St. Jakobskirche, Rothenburg ob der Tauber.

Figure 12. Friedrich Herlin, Main corpus of the *High Altar (Altarpiece of the Twelve Apostles)*, 1466, St. Jakobskirche, Rothenburg ob der Tauber. Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 65.

Figure 13. Friedrich Herlin, Christ figure from the main corpus of the *High Altar (Altarpiece of the Twelve Apostles)*, 1466, St. Jakobskirche, Rothenburg ob der Tauber. Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 69.

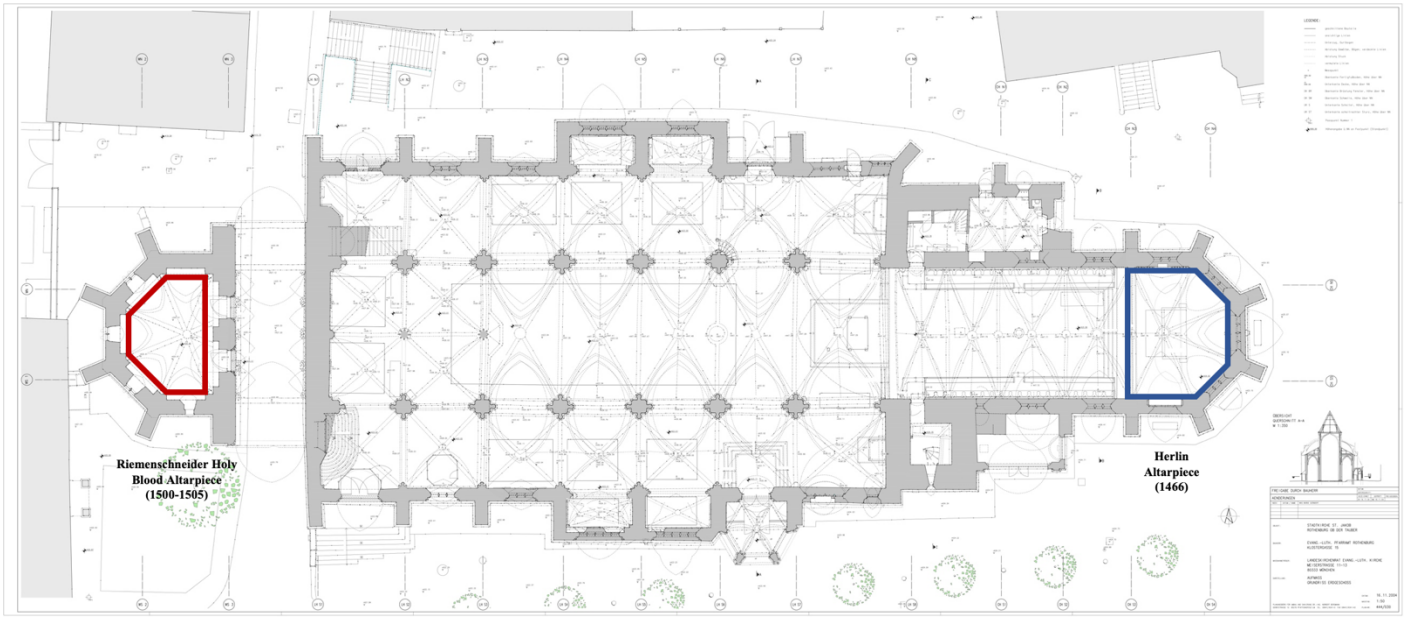


Figure 14. Floorplan of St. James Church, rendering by Büro Bergmann Gmbh Architekten – Bauingenieure, additions marking each chapel space by the author.

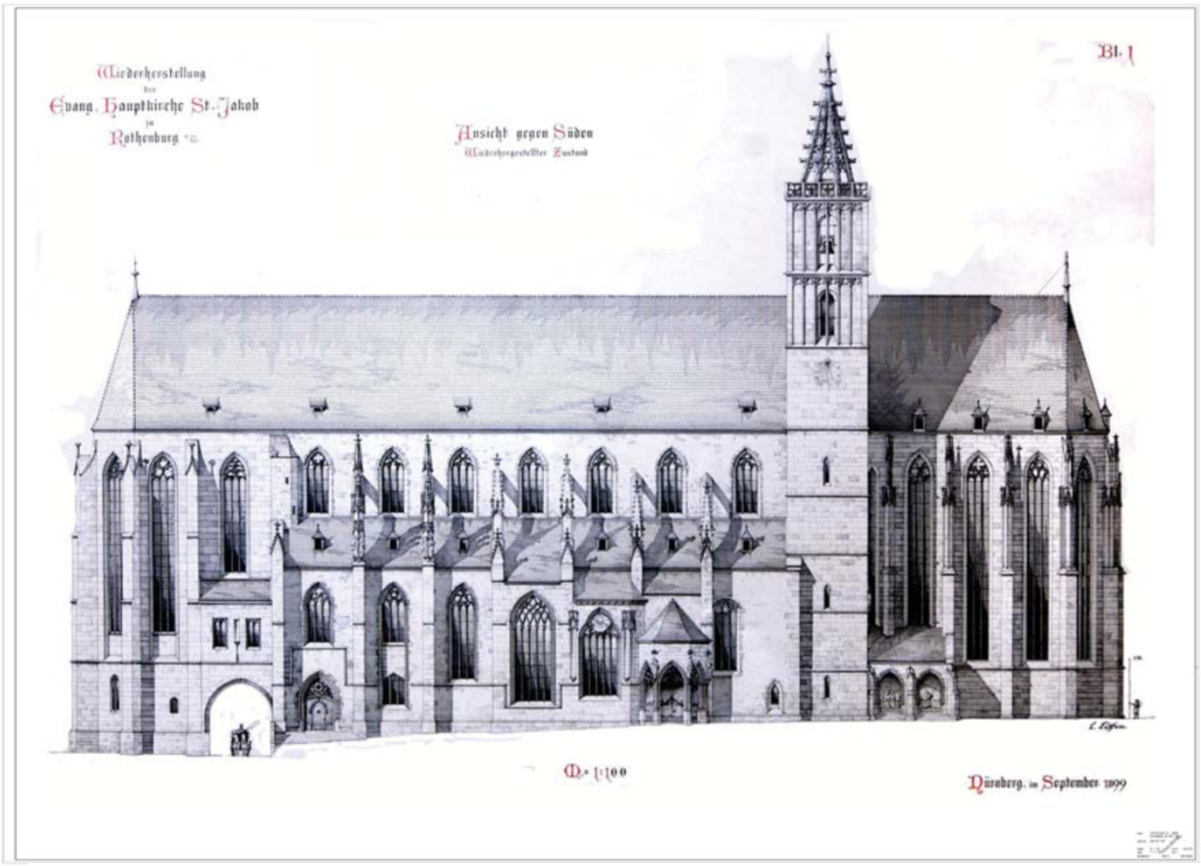


Figure 15. Exterior of St. James, Rothenburg. Rendering by Häffner.

Figure 16. Reconstructed *Altarpiece of St. Mary Magdalene,* 1490-1492, Parish church of St. Mary Magdalene, Münnerstadt.

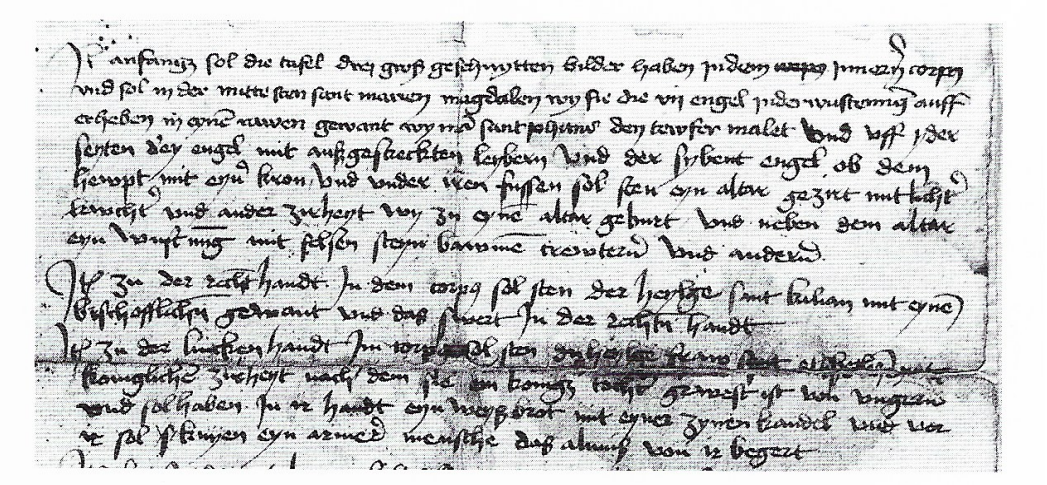


Figure 17. Instructions for the Münnerstadt Altarpiece, detail, Münnerstadt, Parish Archive, document No 10. Image from Iris Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor and His Workshop*. Translated by Grieve, Heide. Königstein im Taunus: Karl Robert Langewiesche Nachfolger Hans Köster, 2004, 31.

Figure 18. *High Altar, St. Martin, Lorch am Rhein,* 1483. Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 127.

Figure 19. Tilman Riemenschneider, *St. Mary Magdalene* from the corpus of the Münnerstadt Altarpiece, 1490-92. Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum.

Figure 20. Tilman Riemenschneider, *Virgin Mary* from the Creglingen Altarpiece, 1505-1508, Herrgottskirche, Creglingen. Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 248.

Figure 21. Martin Schongauer, *The Madonna and Child with the Apple*, 1475, engraving. New York, The Metropolitan Museum.

Figure 22. Tilman Riemenschneider, *The Four Evangelists, Matthew (above left), Mark (above right), Luke (below left), and John (below right),* from the predella of the Münnerstadt Altarpiece, 1490-92. Berlin, Staatliche Museen – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Skulpturensammlung.

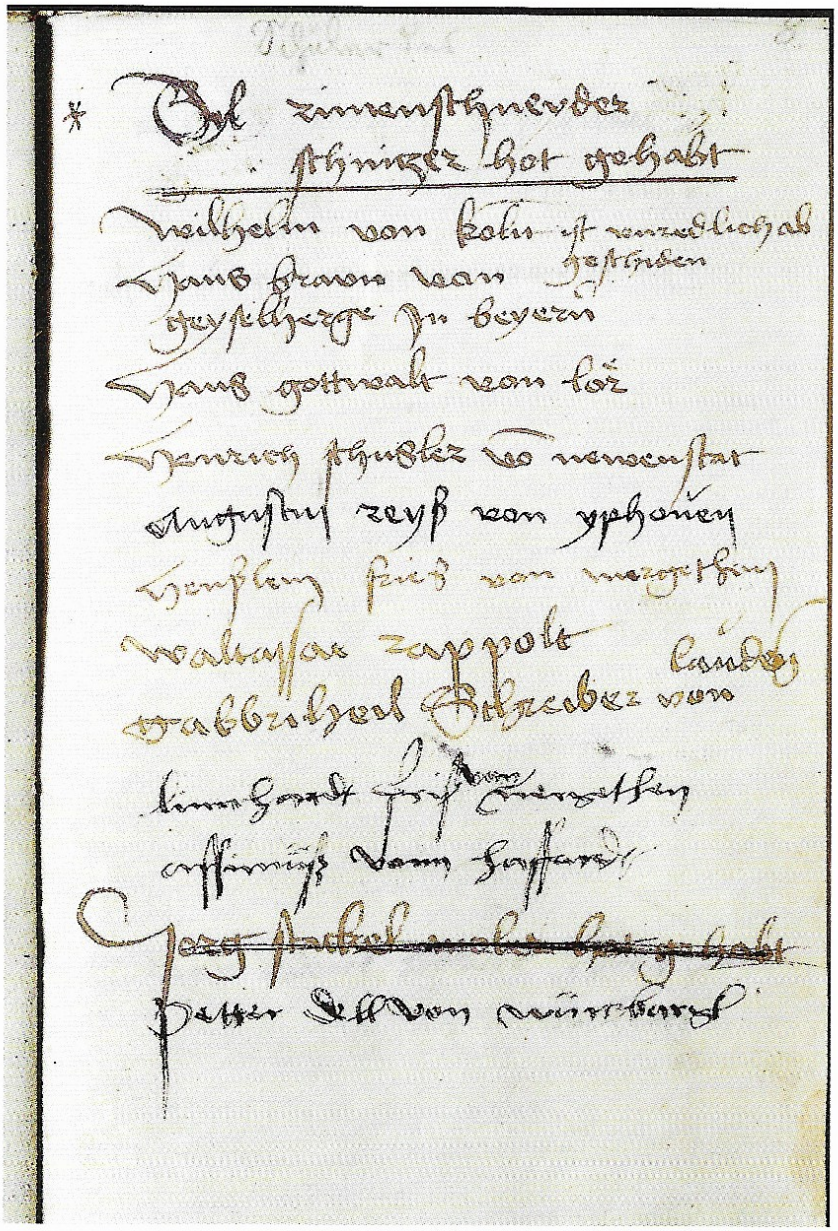


Figure 23. Register of Tilman Riemenschneider's apprentices. Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum. Image from Iris Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider: The Sculptor and His Workshop*. Translated by Grieve, Heide. Königstein im Taunus: Karl Robert Langewiesche Nachfolger Hans Köster, 2004, 19.

Figure 24. Tilman Riemenschneider, *Noli Me Tangere,* from the Münnerstadt, from the wings of the Münnerstadt Altarpiece, 1490-92. Berlin, Staatliche Museen – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Skulpturensammlung.

Figure 25. Martin Schongauer, *Noli Me Tangere,* ca. 1435 – 1491, engraving. New York, The Metropolitan Museum.

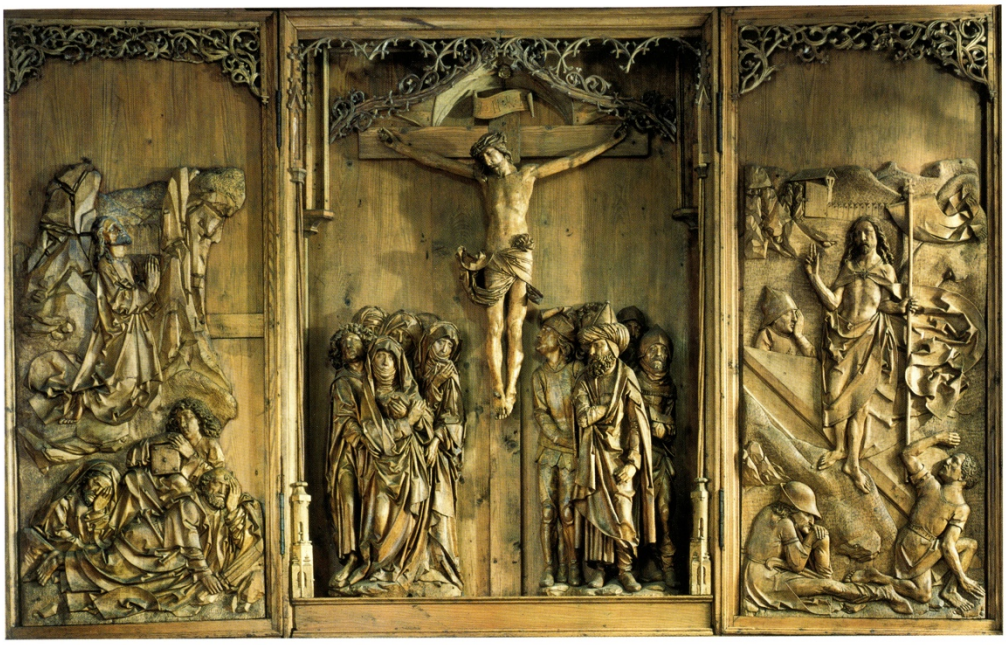


Figure 26. Tilman Riemenschneider, *Crucifixion Altarpiece,* ca. 1505-08. Parish church of St. Peter and St. Paul, Dettwang. Image from Jürgen Lenssen and Leo Andergassen, *Tilman Riemenschneider. Bd.2,* Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2004, 57.

Figure 27. Tilman Riemenschneider, *The Resurrection,* wing panel from the Dettwang Altarpiece, ca. 1505-08. Parish church of St. Peter and St. Paul, Dettwang. Image from Jürgen Lenssen and Leo Andergassen, *Tilman Riemenschneider. Bd. 2,* Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2004, 57.

Figure 28. Martin Schongauer, *The Resurrection,* ca. 1435-1491. New York, The Metropolitan Museum.

Figure 29. Tilman Riemenschneider, *Lamentation Altarpiece,* ca. 1519-22, sandstone. Church of the former Cistercian convent, Maidbronn. Image from Jürgen Lenssen and Leo Andergassen, *Tilman Riemenschneider. Bd. 2*. Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2004, 87.

Figure 30. Rogier van der Weyden, *The Descent from the Cross,* oil on panel, before 1443. Madrid, Museo Del Prado.

Figure 31. View of the Late Gothic Southern Germany sculpture gallery at the Bode Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Screenshot from virtual gallery tour. Features Tilman Riemenschneider's *God the father with the Suffering Christ of the Passion (Throne of Mercy)* c. 1510, Hans Multscher's *The Elevation of the Magdalene* c. 1430 (mounted on wall) and Niclaus Gerhaert von Leyden's *Our Lady of Dangolsheim* c. 1460/65.

Figure 32. Hans Multscher, *The Elevation of the Magdalene,* c. 1430, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

Figure 33. Michel Erhart, *Virgin and Child,* 1470-1480, Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum.

Figure 34. Tilman Riemenschneider, *Virgin and Child on the Crescent Moon*, 1521-22, Washington, DC, House Collection, Dumbarton Oaks Museum.

Figure 35. Tilman Riemenschneider, *Virgin Mary,* ca. 1520, sandstone.
Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung, Frankfurt.

Figure 36. *Two Groups from a Crucifixion,* c. 1470, alabaster, Musée de l'Oeuvre Notre-Dame, Strasbourg.

Figure 36a. *Mourning Women with Saint John,* colored detail. Musée de l'Oeuvre Notre-Dame, Strasbourg.

Figure 37. Nicholas Gerhaert von Leiden, *Epitaph of Canon Konrad von Busang*, 1464, sandstone, Strasbourg Cathedral. Image from Bodo Buczynski, "Niclaus Gerhaert Von Leiden and Tilman Riemenschneider as Stone Sculptors." *Studies in the History of Art* 65, (2004): 170.

Figure 38. Nicolaus Gerhaert von Leyden, *Bust of a man* (two views), 1467, sandstone. Musée de l'Oeuvre Notre-Dame, Strasbourg.

Figure 39. Tilman Riemenschneider, *Adam and Eve,* 1491-93, sandstone. Mainfränkisches Museum, Würzburg. Image from Julien Chapuis, "Recognizing Riemenschneider," in *Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages*, edited by Julien Chapuis, Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1999, 27.

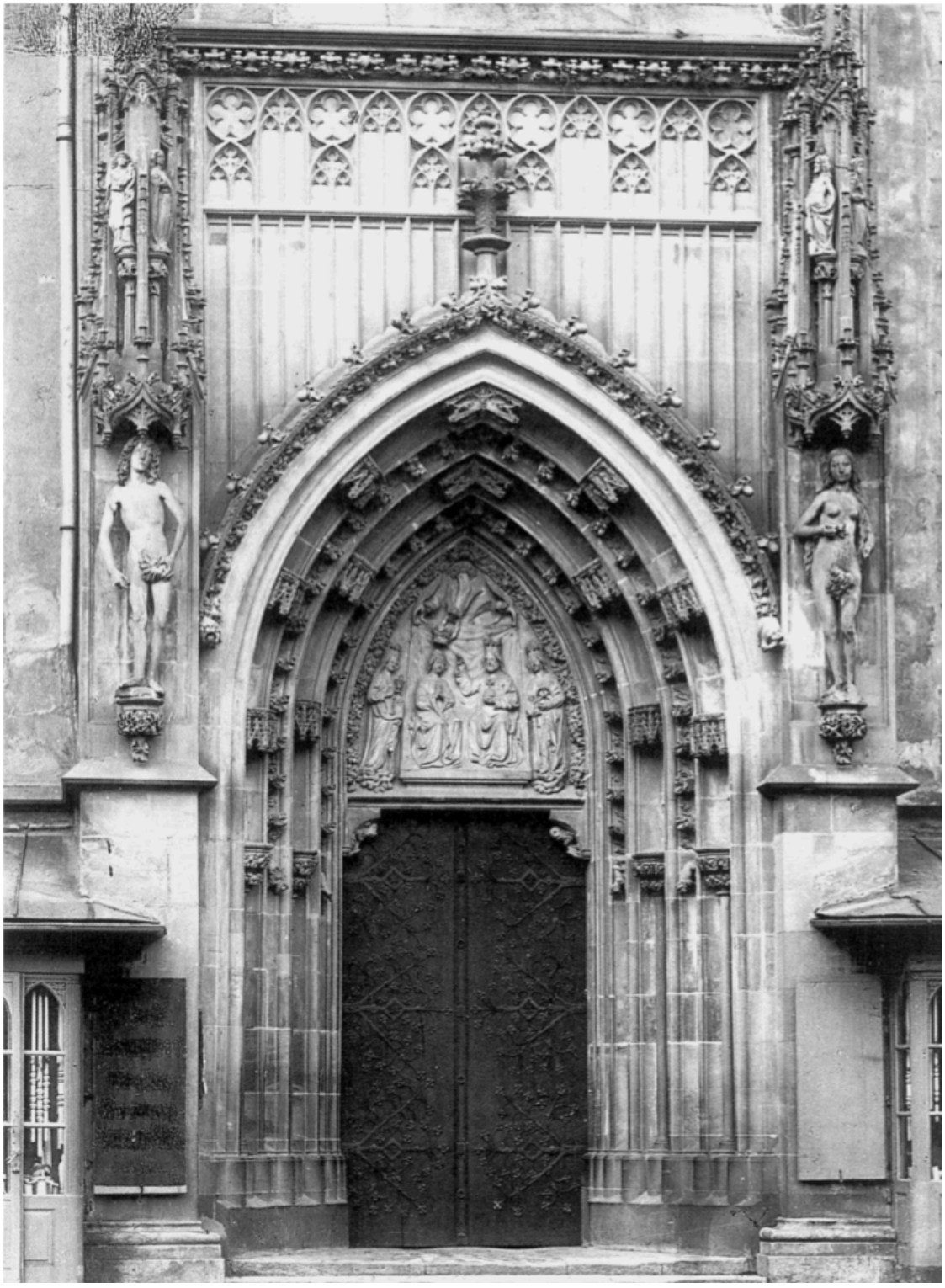


Figure 40. South Portal of the Marienkapelle in Würzburg, Riemenschneider's *Adam and Eve* in situ. Photographed before 1894. Image from Julien Chapuis, "Recognizing Riemenschneider," in *Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages*, edited by Julien Chapuis, Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1999, 53.

Figure 41. Tilman Riemenschneider, *Adam* (detail), 1491-93, sandstone. Mainfränkisches Museum, Würzburg. Image from Claudia Lichte and Iris Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider Bd. 1*. Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2004, 177.

Figure 42. Nicolaus Gerhaert, *Crucifix,* 1467, sandstone, Stiftskirche Unserer Lieben Frau, Baden-Baden. Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 44.

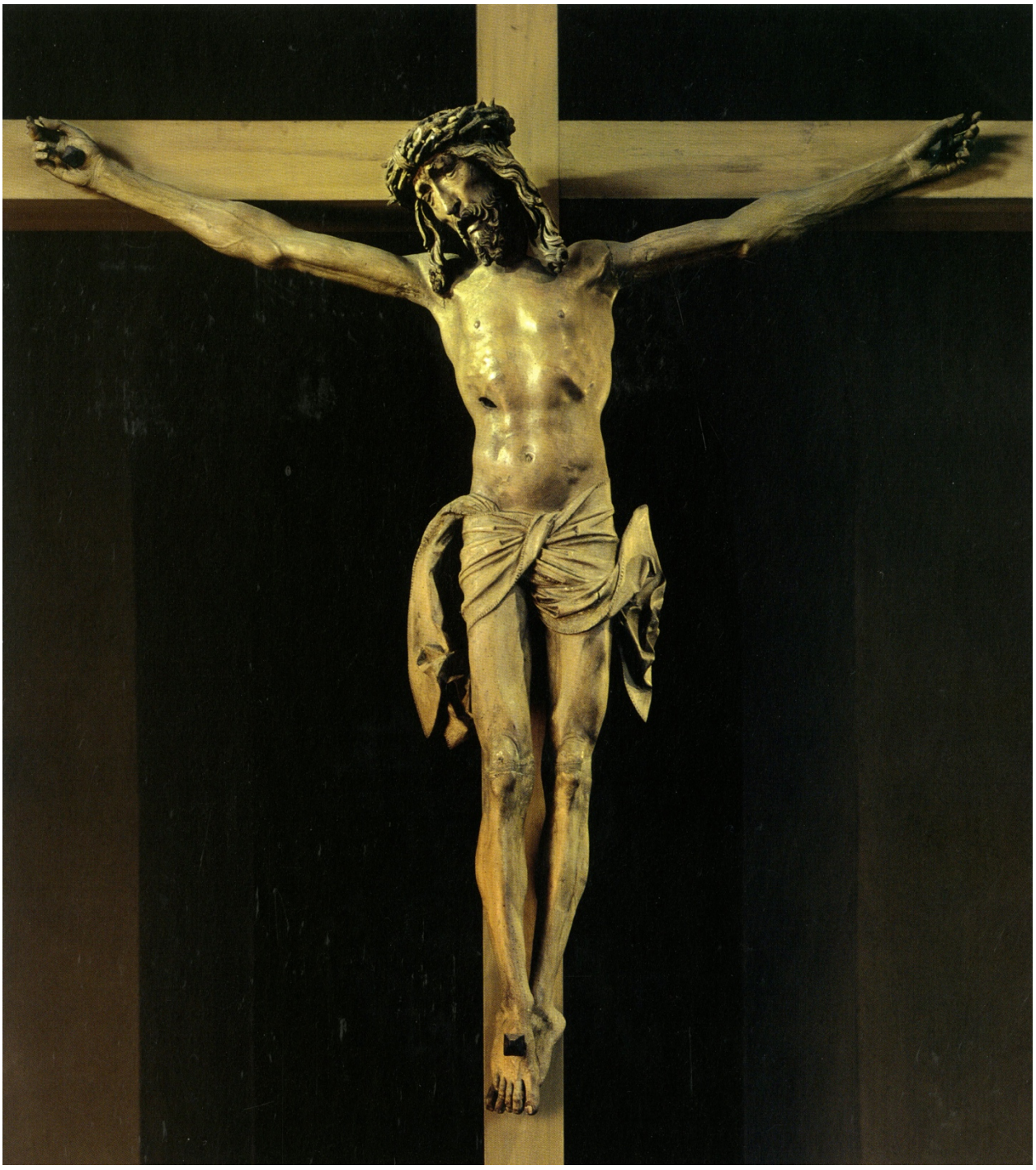


Figure 43. Tilman Riemenschneider, *Christ on the Cross,* 1516, Parish Church, Steinach an der Saale. Image from Jürgen Lenssen and Leo Andergassen, *Tilman Riemenschneider. Bd. 2,* Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2004, 227.

Figure 44. Tilman Riemenschneider, *Christ on the Cross,* (detail) 1516, Parish Church, Steinach an der Saale. Image from Jürgen Lenssen and Leo Andergassen, *Tilman Riemenschneider. Bd. 2,* Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2004, 224.

Figure 45. Tilman Riemenschneider, *Tomb of Bishop Rudolf von Scherenberg,* 1496-99, marble. Image from Jürgen Lenssen and Leo Andergassen, *Tilman Riemenschneider. Bd. 2,* Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2004, 175.

Figure 46. Tilman Riemenschneider, *Tomb of Bishop Rudolf von Scherenberg,* detail, 1496-99, marble. Image from *Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages*, edited by Julien Chapuis. Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1999, 70.

Figure 47. Tilman Riemenschneider, *Altarpiece of the Assumption of the Virgin,* c. 1505-08, Herrgottskirche, Creglingen. Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 245.

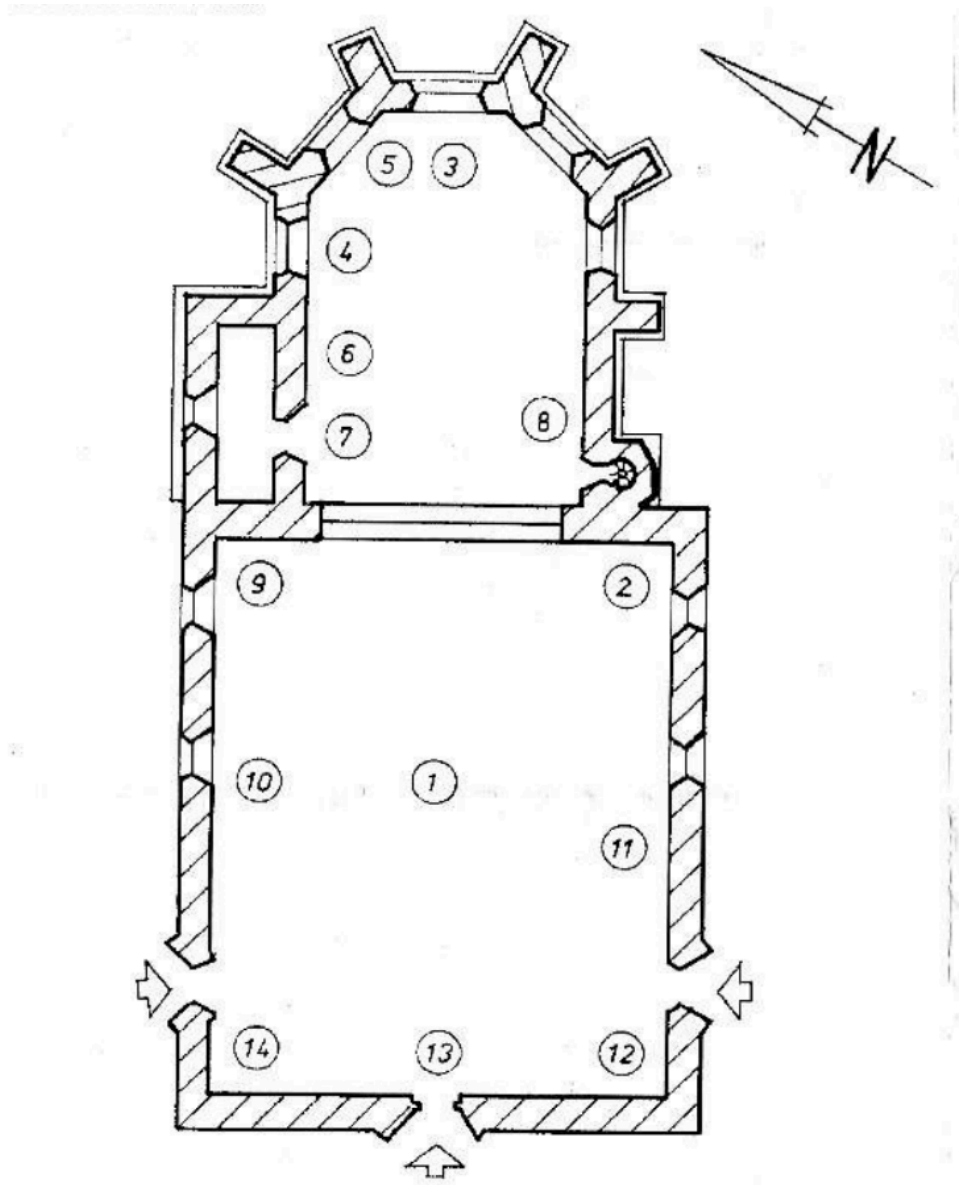


Figure 48. Floorplan of Herrgottskirche, Creglingen. Image from Protestant Parish Council of Creglingen. "Herrgottskirche." Accessed March 10, 2020.

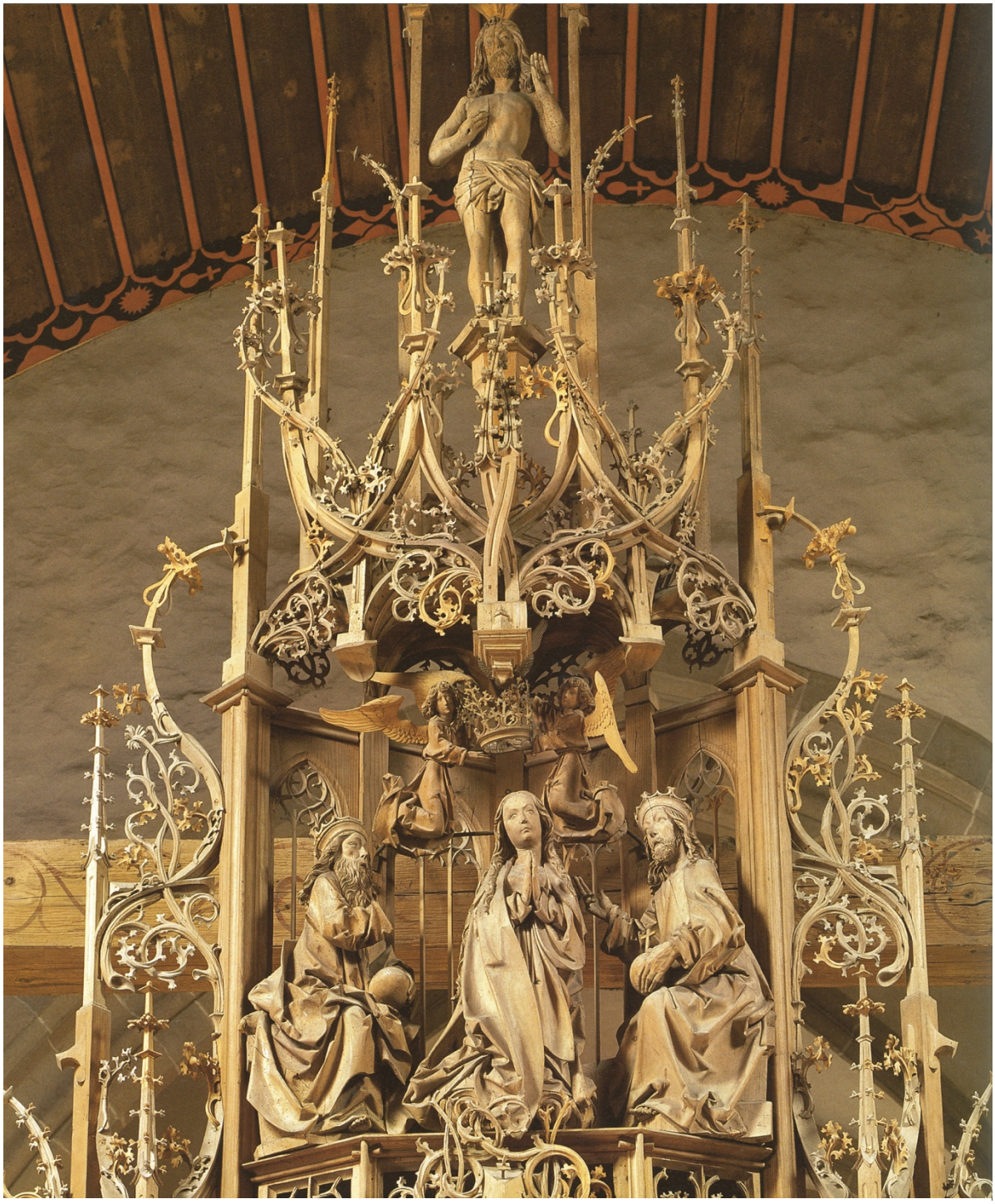


Figure 49. Tilman Riemenschneider, Superstructure of the Creglingen Altarpiece. Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 246.

Figure 50. Tilman Riemenschneider, *The Assumption of the Virgin,* central corpus of the Creglingen Altarpiece. Image from Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 247.

Figure 51. Tilman Riemenschneider, detail of apostle figures, Creglingen Altarpiece. Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 250.

Figure 52. Tilman Riemenschneider, wing panels of the Creglingen Altarpiece. Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 252.

Figure 53. Martin Schongauer, *The Annunciation: The Angel Gabriel,* ca. 1435-1491, engraving. The Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Figure 54. Martin Schongauer, *The Annunciation,* ca. 1435-1491, engraving. The Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Figure 55. Michel Erhart, *High Altar of the Former Abbey Church of St. Johannes der Täufer (Saint John the Baptist),* 1494, Blaubeuren. Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 189.

Figure 56. Michel Erhart, Central shrine of the Blaubeuren Altarpiece: *Madonna and Child between John the Baptist and John the Evangelist, Saint Benedict, and Saint Scholastica;* predella: *busts of Christ and the twelve apostles*, 1493, Benedictine Abbey Church, Blaubeuren. Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 190.

Figure 57. Michel Erhart, Left and Right Wings: *Nativity and Adoration of the Kings,* Blaubeuren Altarpiece. Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 196 and 197.

Figure 58. Michel Erhart, Superstructure of the Blaubeuren Altarpiece. Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 205.

Figure 59. Outer wings of the Blaubeuren Altarpiece. Image from Rainer Kahsnitz and Achim Bunz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 200-01.

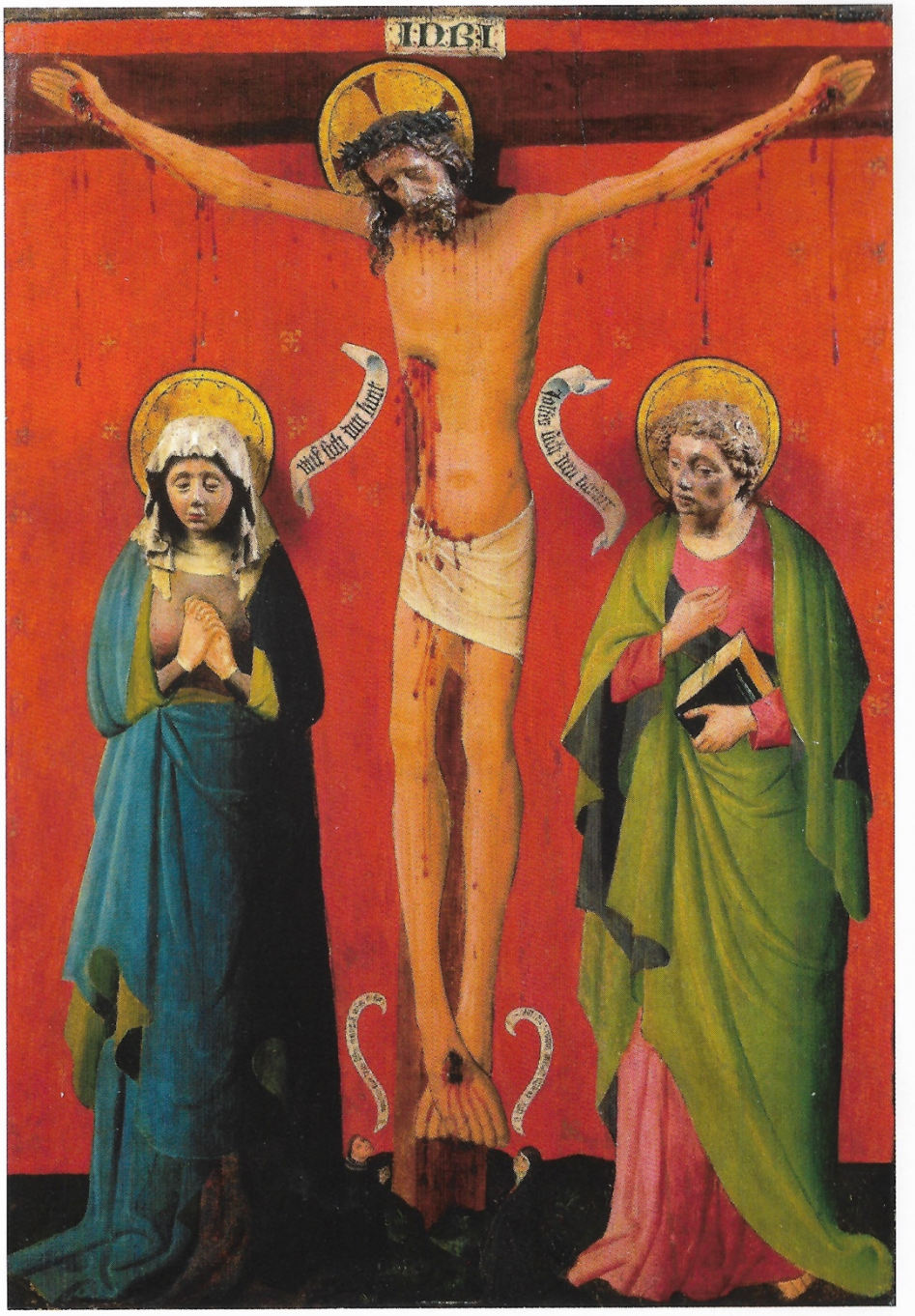


Figure 60. *Crucifixion,* ca. 1430, oak panel, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne. Image from Johannes Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture. Meaning, Form, Conservation.* Los Angeles: Getty Trust Publications, 2015, 11.

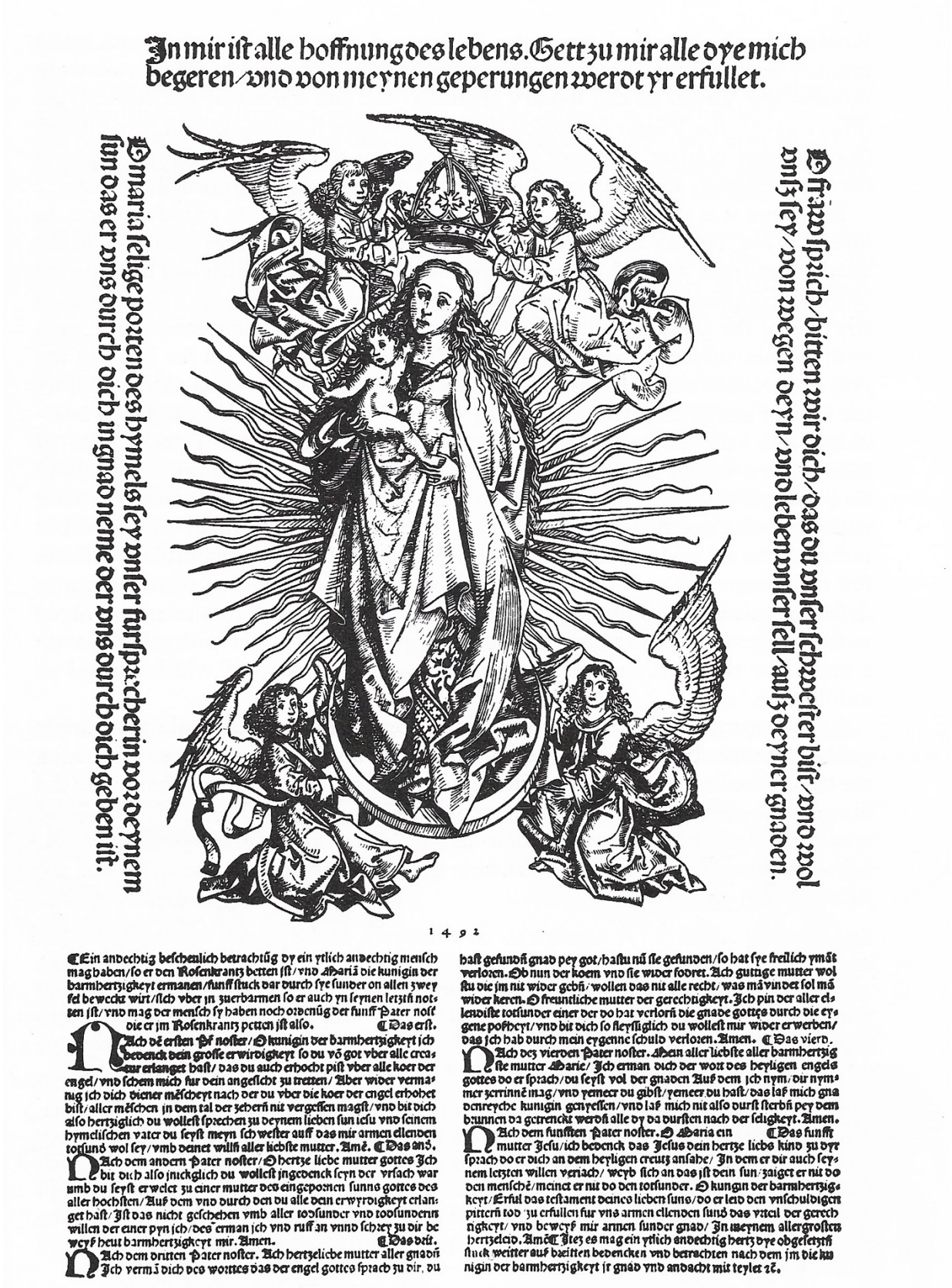
Figure 61. Jörg Syrlin the Younger, Alpirsbach Altarpiece, first quarter of the sixteenth century, abbey church Alpirsbach. Image from Johannes Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture. Meaning, Form, Conservation.* Los Angeles: Getty Trust Publications, 2015, 85.

Figure 62. Swabian Master, *Christ appearing to his Mother* (left), and *Noli me tangere* (right). Reliefs from an altarpiece, limewood. Ottobeuren Abbey Museum. Image from Johannes Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture. Meaning, Form, Conservation.* Los Angeles: Getty Trust Publications, 2015, 90.

Figure 63. Nave and west end of St. James church, Rothenburg. View from North end before erection of the organ. Image from Landesamt für Denkmalpflege, Rothenburg_St. Jakob _001, Katherine M. Boivin, "Holy Blood, Holy Cross: Dynamic Interactions in the Parochial Complex of Rothenburg." *The Art Bulletin* 99, no. 2 (2017): 52.

Figure 64. North portal to West Chapel (left) and South portal (right) with painted inscripitons. Image from Katherine M. Boivin, "Holy Blood, Holy Cross: Dynamic Interactions in the Parochial Complex of Rothenburg." *The Art Bulletin* 99, no. 2 (2017): 50.

Figure 65. Tilman Riemenschneider, View of the *Holy Blood Altarpiece* from the North stairway, St. James Church, Rothenburg. Image from Katherine M. Boivin, "Holy Blood, Holy Cross: Dynamic Interactions in the Parochial Complex of Rothenburg." *The Art Bulletin* 99, no. 2 (2017): 60.



Ein andechtig beschaulich betrachtūg dy ein yetlich andechtig mensch mag haben/ so er den Rosenkrantz betten ist/ vnd Mariā die kunigin der barmhertzigkeyt ermanen/ funff stuck dar durch sye sunder on allen zweyfel beweckt wirt/ sich vber in zuerbarmen so er auch yn seynen letzsten notten ist/ vnd mag der mensch sy haben noch otzenūg der funff Pater nosk die er im Rosenkrantz petten ist also. Das erst.

NAch dē ersten Pf noster/ O kunigin der barmhertzigkeyt ich bedenck dein grosse erwirdigkeyt so du vō got vber alle creatur erlanget hast/ das du auch erhocht pist vber alle koer der engel/ vnd schem mich fur dein angesicht zu tretten/ Aber wider vermanung ich dich diener mēschcheyt nach der du vber die koer der engel erhohet bist/ aller mēschen in dem tal der zehern nit vergessen magst/ vnd bit dich also hertziglich du wollest sprechen zu deynem lieben sun iesu vnd seinem hymelischen vater du seyst meyn sch wester auff das mir armen elenden totsunō wol sey/ vmb deines willn aller liebste mutter. Amē. Das and.

NAch dem andern Pater noster/ O hertze liebe mutter gottes Ich bit dich also inickglich du wollest ingedenck seyn der vrsach warumb du seyst erwelet zu einer mutter des eingepornen sunns gottes des aller hochsten/ Auf dem vnd durch den du alle dein erwyrdigkeyt erlanget hast/ Ist das nicht geschehen vmb aller todsunder vnd todsunderin willen der einer pyn ich/ des erman ich vnd ruff an vnnd schrey zu dir bey deyns heut barmhertzigkeyt mir. Amen. Das drit.

NAch dem dritten Pater noster. Ach hertzeliche mutter aller gnadē Ich verma dich des wortes das der engel gottes sprach zu dir. du hast gefundē gnad pey got/ hastu nū sie gefunden/ so hat sye freilich ymāt verloren. Ob nun der koem vnd sie wider fodret. Ach gutige mutter wolstu die im nit wider gebē/ wollen das nit alle recht/ was mā vnder sol mā wider keren. O freuntliche mutter der gerechtigkeyt. Ich pin der aller elendiste totsunder einer der do hat verlorn die gnade gottes durch die eygene poshcyt/ vnd bit dich so flesslich du wollest mir wider erwerben/ das ich hab durch mein eygenne schuld verlozen. Amen. Das vierd.

NAch dez vierden Pater noster. Mein aller liebste aller barmhertzigste mutter Marie/ Ich erman dich der wort des heyligen engels gottes do er sprach/ du seyst vol der gnaden Aus dem ich nym/ dir nymmer zerrinnē mag/ vnd yemeer du gibst/ yemeer du hast/ das laf mich gnadenreyche kunigin genyessen/ vnd laf mich nit also durst sterbē pey dem brunnen da getrenckt werdē alle dy da durstē nach der seligkeyt. Amen.

NAch dem funfften Pater noster. O Maria ein mutter Jesu/ ich bedenck das Jesus dein hertze liebs kind zu dyr sprach do er dich an dem heyligen creutz ansahe/ In dem er dir auch seynem letzsten willen verlach/ weyb sich an das ist dein sun/ zaiget er nit do den menschē/ meinet er nit do den totsunder. O kungin der barmhertzigkeyt/ Erfull das testament deines liebē suns/ do er leid den vnschuldigen pittern tod zu erfullen fur vns armen elenden sunē das vrteil der gerechtigkeyt/ vnd bewerf mir armen sunder gnad/ In meynem allergrosten hertzeleid. Amē Itez es mag ein yetlich andechtig hertz dye obgesetzten stuck weitter aus dzeitten bedencken vnd betrachten nach dem im die kunigin der barmhertzigkeyt ir gnad vnd andacht mit teyle zc.

Figure 66. *Devotion of the Rosary,* Broadsheet, Nuremberg (Anton Koberger), 1492 (Schr. XVII, 407). Image from Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980, 57.

Figure 67. Veit Stoss, *Angelic Salutation,* (1517-1518). St. Lorenz Kirche, Nuremberg.

Figure 68. Veit Stoss, *Angelic Salutation*, (detail). Image from Johannes Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture. Meaning, Form, Conservation.* Los Angeles: Getty Trust Publications, 2015, 64.

Figure 69. Tilman Riemenschenider, *Virgin and Child in a Rosary,* 1521-24. Wallfahrtskapelle Maria im Wiengarten (pilgrimage chapel of the Virgin in the Vineyard), Kirchberg near Volkach. Image from Jeffrey Chipps Smith, "A Fragile Legacy: Würzburg's Sculpture After Riemenschneider." *Studies in the History of Art* 65, (2004): 178.

Figure 70. Tilman Riemenschneider, *Virgin and Child in a Rosary,* view with stained-glass windows. Image from Jürgen Lenssen and Leo Andergassen, *Tilman Riemenschneider. Bd. 2,* Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2004, 47.

Figure 71. Tilman Riemenschneider, *Virgin and Child in a Rosary,* detail. Image from Jürgen Lenssen and Leo Andergassen, *Tilman Riemenschneider. Bd. 2,* Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2004, 30.

Figure 72. Jörg Riemenschneider, *Tombstone of Tilman Riemenschneider,* Mainfränkisches Museum, Würzburg. Image from Claudia Lichte and Iris Kalden-Rosenfeld, *Tilman Riemenschneider Bd. 1*. Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2004, 40.